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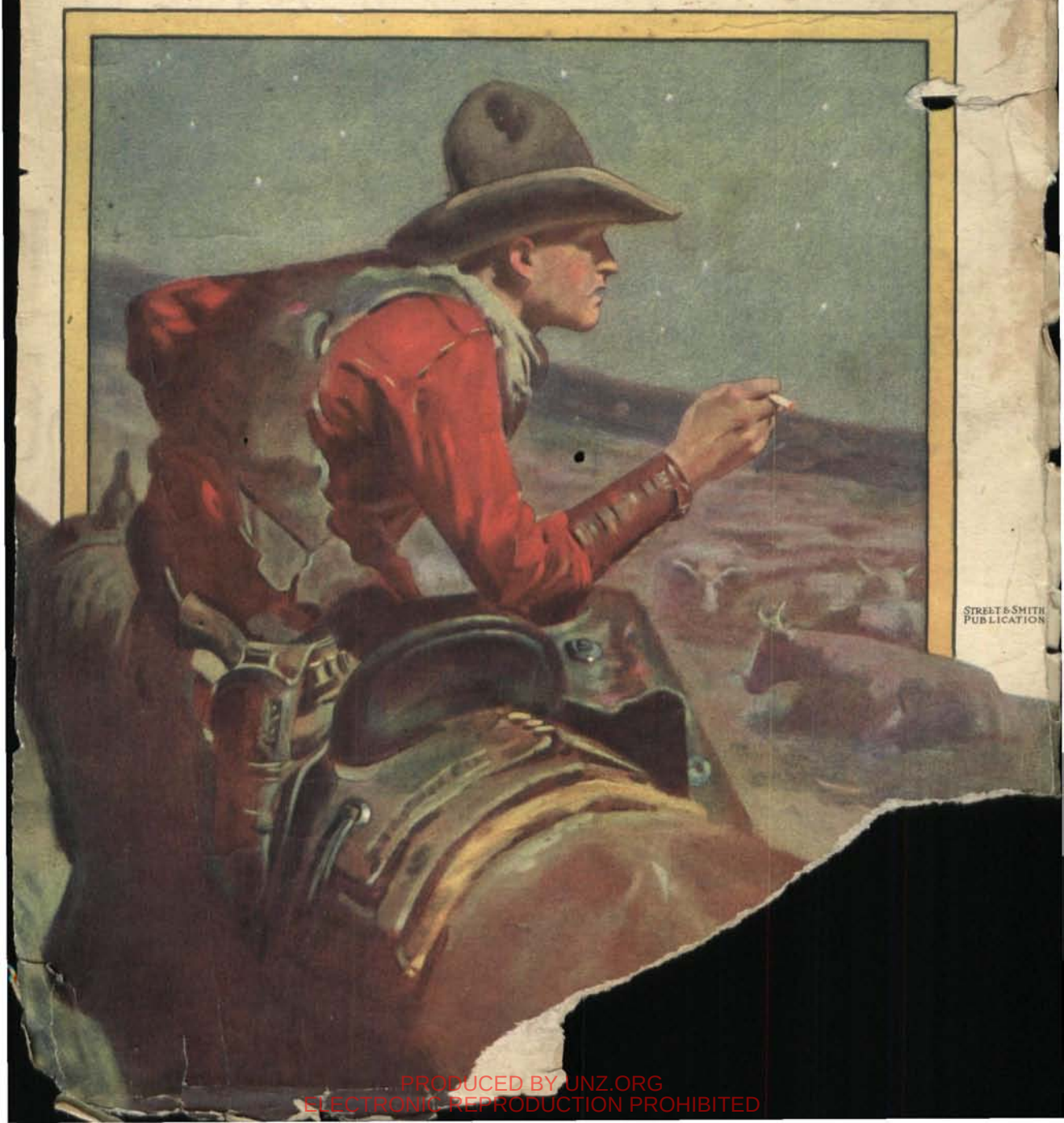

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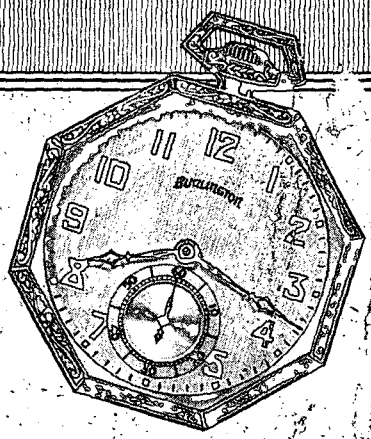

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WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

EVERY WEEK

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A Novelette

By CLEM YORE

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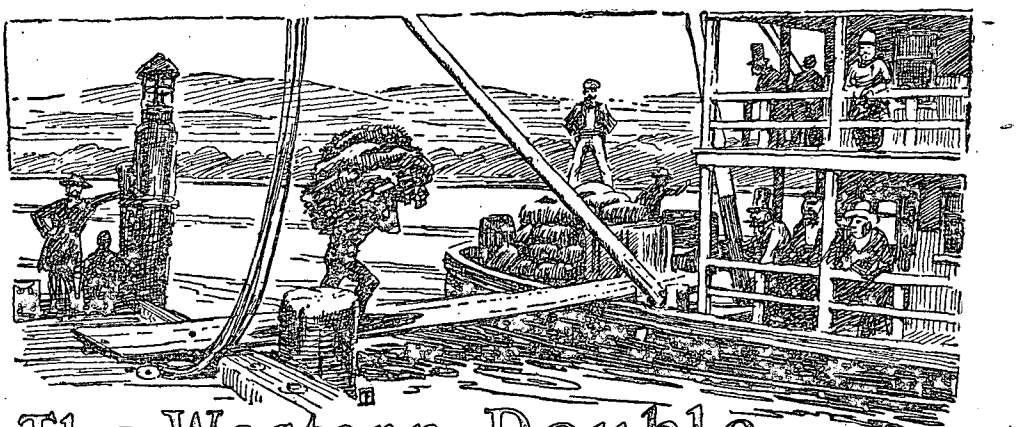

The Western Double

by George Owen Baxter

Author of "Flaming Fortune," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A WRONG START.

THERE has never been any doubt in my mind that what I was intended for by nature was a life in the great West, where the cattle run the range and where the mountains have a meaning that is not entirely scenic. I was born with the hand and the eye and the heart for it and, as for the reasons which took me part of my life from the West—well, most of them were so foolish that I am almost ashamed to write them down.

It began with my dear mother, the best and the kindest soul in the whole world, but nevertheless preëminently a mother, and therefore entirely blind where I was concerned. There was enough heart in her to have mothered ten; but I was her only child, and was enveloped in a cloud of intense feeling—worship it became later.

She had been simply a jolly, pretty range girl, in the beginning; but it was in a frontier district where pretty girls were a rarity and treated somewhat like saints. In a region of Indian wars, cattle and sheep feuds, wildness and outlawry, where the rough-handed outcasts of the world assembled to find new lives, there was a premium upon nice girls. And no doubt my father

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considered himself the luckiest man in the world when he was able to marry her. I don't think that he had much to commend him beyond stately good looks, and a very accurate rifle. He was fairly well known as a hunter and trapper and trader among the Indians; and, when he appeared at the fort in his suit of antelope skin, with the finest beaded moccasins on his feet and his long hair flowing down over his shoulders, of course he took the eye of the ladies. So he married my mother; I was born; and three months later he was killed by a drunken Comanche.

Ah, I'm glad that I was an infant, then, and not able to understand the grief of my mother! But as long as I knew her she could never speak of my father without tears in her eyes. He had died in the very height of their romance. He was still a great and glorious man, to her. And there she was, left with the only person in the world that possessed a drop of his blood, her baby boy!

It made that baby boy a sacred thing. She felt that she was far from good enough to deserve such a great treasure, and she began to make herself over so that she should be able to rear me as I ought to be reared. If my father had lived, I would have been turned out in his own pattern, a trader, hunter, and a jolly, happy fellow. But that would not suit my mother now. She began to read and study and improve herself. And, as I grew old enough for teaching, she began to teach me, desperately, and reverently, and endlessly!

I always had to have a book in my hands. I could read and write when I was four, when I should have been rolling in the dust and pulling the hair of the other boys in the fort. When I was six, I was quite a scholar. And when I was ten, I was really getting on with my books, and the priest at the fort had taken over part of my studies and was prepared to carry them on past the point where my mother could have taken them.

Then one day my uncle, Stephen Larkin, came into my life with a strong hand. He was a typical frontiersman. There was no real malice in him, but he could hardly speak without swearing, and he told my mother frankly that she was ruining me. She was amazed. She felt that what she had been doing for me should be the admiration of the world; and, though she didn't say so, she let my uncle understand her pride. He merely snorted.

"There's not a boy in that street," he said, "who can't thrash him."

My mother went to the window and looked out. The street was filled with children.

"Nonsense!" said she at last. "Isn't he the true son of his father?"

"Not a little bit!" said Uncle Steve. "The man you married was the straightest-shooting, hardest-riding, fastest-hitting man on the prairies. And you've got a boy that's only the son of a book. Open him up and what's inside of him? Just print!"

My mother turned around to me with fire in her eyes. She was a frontierswoman herself. She would rather have seen a man dead than shamed with cowardice.

"Are you afraid of any of those boys?" said she.

I was. Horribly! But I merely smiled. Of course I was not, I said.

"There you are, Stephen!" says she.

"Stuff!" said Uncle Steve. "It's easy enough to talk like that, but the little rat is getting blue around the gills. Look here, Sammy——"

"His name is Samuel," corrected my mother coldly.

"Sammy," said Uncle Steve, "you see that kid out there with the freckled nose and the black, stringy hair? Do you dare go out and slap his face? He's shorter than you are."

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Of course he was. But a great deal broader, and ten times as muscular. He was the terror of the whole town. I closed my eyes and then I told myself that, after all, it couldn't last long, because the first blow would knock me out of time. So I walked out the door and slapped the face of the hero. He was too surprised to do a thing, for a moment, and then he started in and tore me to ribbons.

He knocked me into the fence, where my jacket caught on a picket and held me up so that I couldn't slip down into the dust, and there I hung and got a lambasting. I think that the second or third punch knocked my wits away. Finally my uncle came out and picked me off the fence and carried me into the house; and my mother, with a white face, began to sponge my cuts and bruises.

The first word that I could understand as I came to was my mother saying, "He didn't cry out once for help!"

"No," said my uncle, "he took his licking as game as ever I seen. As game as ever I seen! But, just the same, it was a licking."

My mother was silent, and with my swollen eyes shut, and a hundred pains darting through my body, I realized that the picket and the senselessness together had held me up and made a hero of me in the eyes of my family. I felt a guilty joy until I heard my uncle say, "We're going to have this out of him. Honey, I'm going to teach that kid to fight!"

"Never!" cried my mother. "He's meant for better things."

"Fight like his daddy did before him," said Uncle Stephen.

And that won! My mother could never play a card over the mention of my father's name. Uncle Stephen declared that I had earned a vacation from studies and that he was going to take me for three weeks into the mountains, hunting.

It was five months before we returned. I went out soft and sappy and sagging at the knees. I came back like an Indian, on my toes. Every day I had to handle a rifle and a pistol; every day I had to do tricks with a bowie knife. And more than that, and worst of all, I had to box with my uncle for at least a half hour at the beginning of each day. He meant to be gentle, but he was twice as strong as he guessed; besides, he used to say, "I tell you three times how to block a straight left. Three times I show you and tell you. The fourth time, if you can't do it, you take it!"

Well I can remember standing up blubbering with rage and shame and pain and fear to be knocked down half a dozen times running. But the seventh time I learned the trick. Yes, Uncle Stephen was a brutal fellow. But he felt that it was better for me to get a beating from a member of the family than from an outsider.

"I don't want to have to die for you, kid," he used to say, "and unless you learn something, one of these days I'm going to see you a growed-up man, and shamed by some one, and then I'll have to step in on your side. Why, when I was your age, I could catch a wild cat by the tail and wring it off! There was nothing that I wouldn't fight and there was nothing that I couldn't kill!"

That was probably close to the truth. And for five months we hunted and he made a man of me. During four months of that time I moaned for home and mother. But before the end I had begun to handle myself a bit better. And on my twelfth birthday I ducked a straight left and belted my uncle in the stomach with a neat right hook.

He gasped, then grabbed me in his arms and hugged me.

"Now wait till you get that freckle-faced little half-breed!" said he.

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That was what I was waiting for too.

When we got home again, my mother held me off at arm's length and cried over her shag-haired, brown-faced, wild-eyed son. But when she took me in her arms she cried, "Samuel, darling, you've turned into iron!" And some laughter mingled with her tears.

That very afternoon I went hunting for the freckle-faced boy, and found him, and slapped his face again.

This time I should like to say that I thrashed him thoroughly, but the truth is that I didn't. I had learned a great deal, and grown strong; but in five months I couldn't pick up the vast, burning vitality which was in that youngster. I had the skill and fighting wit. But he took all that I could give him, and then whipped me terribly until I lay face down in the dust, bloody, stunned, helpless.

However, it was a grand go. It made my name in the town. And not a boy dared treat me lightly afterward, not even that half-breed, in spite of his victory.

Twice again in the next year I tried him, and then the third time I won. But by that time, to confess again, I had height and weight as an advantage, together with my greater skill. But when I came home, it was a great event, and my uncle swore that he was the proudest man west of the Mississippi, and I think he was. At least, I remember that he gave me a revolver to celebrate the event. It was a clumsy old Colt, but in those days any sort of a revolver was a curiosity and a treasure. Hand to hand, it could take six lives while the rifle was taking one. And Uncle Stephen saw to it that I began to master the weapon.

I don't want you to think that I was given up to fighting and brawling and hunting from that moment. No, mother kept me closely under her wing and at my studies until I was seventeen; except that every summer I was allowed to go off trapping and hunting with Uncle Steve.

I came back from the last of those trips, eighteen years old, an inch over six feet, and with a hundred and eighty pounds on my bones. I had been trained to fight wild cats, as Uncle Steve used to say, and I felt quite up to it. I could handle a bowie knife like an expert; and I knew the intimate secrets of fanning a revolver and rifle work at short range and long. I could ride a horse as bad as they came; and I was just in the mood to conquer the world when I walked into my mother's house and found her lying dead with three women of the neighborhood weeping beside her bed.

Kneeling in the dimness of that room and crying over her cold, thin hand, I knew that my boyhood had ended and that something more serious than fist fights lay before me.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAFETY KILLER.

THERE was a pause in my life, after that. With all my heart, I longed to be off running buffalo, or trailing hostile Indians, or trapping beaver on the northern streams with Uncle Steve, but the stern voice of conscience told me that my mother had not raised me for any such destiny. She had intended that the culture she gave me should be put to a proper use, and therefore I must lead a quieter life.

Well, what sort of a quiet life could a youngster find in a frontier fort? I looked about me and tried to find the best way out, but all that I could get to do was to keep an account book in a trader's office. I became a clerk and for three years I remained in that position, learning how Indians can be made drunk and stupid, while their goods are filched away from them, and how

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cheap beads can be used to buy fine buffalo robes. I learned other things, also. My boss never lost his keen wits, but sometimes he lost the use of his hands and feet from too many potations of the poison which he sold as whisky. And on those occasions I had to take my place with him at the work of trade. For when he was a bit under the influence of liquor there were grave chances that some man, white or red, would try to take advantage of him and loot the place. On those days there was apt to be a call for a revolver shot, or a bowie knife thrown with an accurate hand; but most frequently, there was need for a well-placed set of knuckles on the point of another man's jaw.

For three years I carried on this intermittent war against my fellows. Each year my salary was increased. I began to share some of the profits of the store. I was a valued man. And then on a day the marshal of that district walked in and had a little chat with me.

I've never forgotten him. Long afterward he made name and fame for himself; but, even in those old days, he was already a known man along the border. He was short, thick-necked, deep-chested, with a pair of pale, sad eyes.

"Do you know me, Mr. Cross?" said he.

"Yes, sir. You are Marshal Shane O'Rourke."

"I'm glad you know me. And I trust that you know me as a fellow who likes to keep young men straight?"

"I know that, sir," said I. "Will you sit down here?"

"When I have to say mean things," said the marshal, "I'd rather stand up and look a man in the eye."

That took me back a little.

"If you've heard something against me," said I, "I can tell you that you're on the wrong trail."

"Are you sure?" said he.

"Sure, sir," said I.

"What makes you sure, lad?" he asked.

"I've never stolen a penny in my life, never 'borrowed' a horse or a dollar. I've never been drunk and disorderly. I've stuck to my work and never bothered a soul that would leave me alone."

"That sounds good," said the marshal, "and I think that it's true enough. I think that it's true enough." He nodded at me while he talked, and then he went on, "Nothing happened to you the last few days?"

"Nothing," says I.

"Think close," said he.

"Not a thing. Everything's been quiet and as usual."

"H'm!" said he. "I thought that there was some trouble yesterday?"

Frowning, I recalled the record of yesterday, and fumbled with the edges of a pile of buffalo robes that had just been brought in by a party of Piegans that had come away down from their ordinary hunting grounds to trade there.

"Nothing yesterday," I told him, "except for a fool of a negro teamster who insisted that he had been short-changed."

"Did he make much excitement?"

"No," said I, "we had to take him away from the post, that was all."

"So drunk that he let himself be led away, I suppose?" said the marshal.

"No, sir," I retorted. "He was a big surly brute, and he drew a knife on Mr. Chandler. I had to knock him down and carry him out to the shed. He sobered up and went away quite peaceably."

"All right," said the marshal, "and what about the day before yesterday. Anything happen that day?"

"No, sir, not a thing."

"Think close."

"I am thinking."

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"No other drunken negroes?"

"No, but the day before that there was more of a commotion. A couple of Piegans filled themselves with raw alcohol and a very little water. They decided that it was a cold day and started to set fire to the store. Of course we had to stop them."

"I didn't know that any one here spoke Piegan," he commented.

"No, sir," said I, "of course we didn't have time to persuade them with words."

"Then what did you use on them?" the marshal asked.

"You would have laughed at it," said I. "I didn't want to hurt them, so I just took this ox whip, you see? Loaded handle and a lash that cuts like a knife. I gave them a taste of that."

I could not help laughing as I remembered.

"You whipped them away, then?" chuckled the marshal, very sympathetic.

"Yes. They scampered, and howled like fiends. Except the chief. He came for me with an old pistol. Luckily I managed to knock him down with the loaded butt of the whip before he murdered me."

"Didn't kill him, though?"

"No, the doctor thinks that he'll live —or did think so yesterday. I haven't heard since," I replied.

The marshal turned away a bit and looked through the window. The snow was beginning to fall, and spotting the surface of the pane with splotches of white.

"The day before the Piegan party," he asked.

"What about it, sir?"

"Any trouble that day, if you can remember that far back?"

"Nothing of real importance. Wait a moment! Yes, a gambler from the river boats came here asking for a gun. We showed him the best we had and asked a fair price. He was very hot about it. Used foul language. Mr. Chandler asked him to leave the store. Then he declared that he was a gentleman and that he had been insulted by being ordered off the premises. He was one of those Southern hot-heads, Marshal O'Rourke."

"Yes, I know the type," sighed the marshal.

"He finally whipped out a pair of dueling pistols and told us that he was going to teach us a lesson in courtesy that would last us the rest of our lives. Absolutely mad, marshal!"

"I hope that he didn't do any harm?" the marshal remarked.

"No, sir, I managed to get in a shot from the hip that dropped him."

"Well, well! That was lucky, eh?" he commented.

"Wasn't it!" I exclaimed.

"And what's become of him?"

"Mr. Chandler paid the funeral expenses very handsomely," said I. "Mr. Chandler is never niggardly about such things, sir."

"True, true!" said the marshal. "So I've heard! But the day before the gambler. Do you recall that day?"

"It's rather dim. Let me see," said I. "I believe that I do remember something. Yes, as a matter of fact, a trapper came in and swore that some of the outfit we had sold to him last year had been faulty. Mr. Chandler asked to see the faulty traps. The man cursed us, swore that he would have his money back, and declared that he wouldn't put himself to the trouble of carting worthless traps all the way back home. Mr. Chandler told him that in that case there was nothing to be done, of course. You can appreciate that, sir? Business rule!"

"Naturally. A business rule!" said the marshal. "Well, such things have to be! Of course! How did the affair turn out?"

"He jerked up his rifle to the ready," said I, "but there was really no hurry.

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I could take my time, so I shot him through the right thigh. A bullet there drops a man just as well as one through the heart, for that matter. Excuse me if I tell you a thing that you know perfectly well, marshal."

"What is your job here?" asked the marshal suddenly.

"Why, I'm the clerk, sir," said I.

"How many hours a day at the books then?" he pursued.

"Why, sometimes two or three at the accounts."

"Sometimes, but on an average?" he insisted.

"Well, perhaps less than an hour."

"And what is your pay, Cross?"

"Mr. Chandler raised me last month. I'm now getting fifteen hundred dollars a year," I told him.

"Fifteen hundred!" cried the marshal, and stared at me.

Remember that those days were in the long ago. A dollar was a dollar, at that time, even on the frontier.

"Mr. Chandler is very generous," said I.

"Darned generous," said the marshal bluntly. "Fifteen hundred for an hour's work a day! That's about five dollars an hour, isn't it, not counting the Sundays?"

"Why, sir, about that, I suppose I never thought of it that way!"

"No doubt you didn't," said the marshal, with a hidden meaning in his voice. "And now, tell me. It can't be that Chandler is paying you for anything other than bookkeeping?"

"Why, no, sir!"

"It couldn't be, for instance," said the marshal, "that he has you here to do his fighting for him?"

I stared at him.

"Mr. Chandler can take care of himself with any man," I told him.

"How many fights has Chandler had in the past year?"

I merely stared. There was no answer. I began to "think close."

The marshal went on "You tell me first that everything has been quiet here lately and that nothing has happened. Then, in the course of your memories of five days, I hear about a fist fight, the flogging of a party of dangerous Blackfeet, one man shot dead, and another dropped with a revolver bullet! Is this an ordinary program, young man?"

"Why, sir," said I, "as a matter of fact, sometimes we run on for ten days at a time without a particle of trouble!"

"Exactly!" said the marshal. "And I'll tell you why! The strangers around here know no better than to make trouble, but those who have the proper information take care to keep away from Mr. Chandler's hired man-killer!"

CHAPTER III.

GOOD ADVICE FROM THE MARSHAL.

IT was a tremendous shock to me. It made my world spin around before my eyes. Who was it that said none of us know ourselves?

The voice of the marshal cut in on my bewilderment. "Give me that gun!"

"What gun, sir?"

"The one you have your hand on!"

Sure enough, I had automatically laid a hand on the butt of my revolver. I grew very hot.

"I meant nothing by that," I explained. "Just an instinct, sir. You've been talking very frankly, sir!"

I gave him the gun; he frowned down at it.

"How many men has this weapon killed, young man?" he asked.

"It is a new gun, sir," said I.

"New, eh? Were you wearing it when you shot the gambler?"

"As a matter of fact I was, sir."

"And that's one notch that might have been filed. You don't file notches, Sammy Cross?"

"Why, sir," said I, "when a man is

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out on the trail of an Indian war party, I can understand his filing a notch for every dead man. But, as for the nasty little things that happen in a quiet trader's store, of course I couldn't claim any credit for that!"

"Bah!" snorted the marshal.

I turned cold.

"Mr. O'Rourke," said I, "I've taken a great deal from you. May I be allowed to say, sir, that I won't take another word of any kind in the way of —insult?"

"And what will you do, eh?" said the marshal. "I have your gun!"

"You haven't my knife, though!"

And it glimmered in my hand that instant.

"A gun against a knife?" said he.

"It's just as quick!" I told him. "And it will kill nearly as surely!"

He looked at me out of narrowed eyes.

"You cold-blooded young——" he began.

Then he paused.

"Marshal," said I, "I'm glad that you didn't finish that sentence."

"You are, eh? About the war trails that you speak of. I suppose that leading a quiet life like yours, with your books to keep up, you haven't had many occasions to ride on the war-path?"

"No, sir," I confessed with a sigh, "I lead a rather dull life, on the whole. Terribly dull. There's very rarely any excitement. In the past three or four years I've only joined 'vengeance' parties half a dozen times."

"Humph!" said he.

"Seven times, to be exact."

"You were carrying other guns on the war trails?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Lemme see them!"

I brought in two rifles and a pair of revolvers. He snatched them from me. He didn't look at the mechanism, but only at the under part of the stocks of the rifles and the handles of the revolvers.

"Young man," said he suddenly, "there are eleven notches on these guns altogether."

"Yes, sir," said I.

"And these are the only guns you have?"

"One very old one I sold last month," I told him.

"Any notches on it?"

"Only two, sir," said I. "It was a stupid brute of a gun. Bore horribly to the right."

"Only two!" said the marshal. "Only two! *Only* two human souls sent to eternity by you with that old gun that 'bore horribly to the right,' eh? And in three years you've *only* been seven times on the war path! And on those trails you've *only* killed eleven men! And besides those, there are the men uncounted who were knocked over in the quiet matter of 'business!' The lives that didn't count!"

And he added fiercely "You young murderer!"

The knife shook in my hand. But I checked myself with a frightful effort, for he let the muzzle of my revolver hang toward the floor and made no move to protect himself.

"O'Rourke," I said through my teeth, "I've given you a warning before, and now you can act on it."

"Shut up!" said the marshal. "Oh, shut up, Cross. I tell you, it makes me heartsick! I knew your mother! And what would she think of a son like you? Answer me that!"

The knife glided out of my hand and stuck point down in the floor. I slumped down on an empty whisky barrel. And from that position I stared up at the man of the law.

"Marshal O'Rourke," said I suddenly, "tell me the truth."

"What truth d'you want?" he asked me, savage as ever.

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"Tell me what men really say about me?"

"They call you a safety killer!"

I had heard that expression before, used to describe the men who made their business and their pleasure the killing of others, but who would never fight unless they knew that the law was sure to protect them. Of all the men on the border, they were the most loathed, and the out-and-out gun fighters, who slew from an irresistible passion for fight, were considered infinitely above the "safety killers" in morality.

I writhed under that accusation.

"It's not true! It's not true!" I groaned. "O'Rourke, I'll swear that it's not true!"

He remained there, looking down at me, searching me, with a sort of cruel understanding and compassion in his eyes.

"Lad," said he, "how old are you? Twenty-six?"

"No, sir, a shade under twenty-two."

"Twenty-two!" he echoed.

"It's perfectly true."

The marshal turned away and began to stamp up and down the floor.

"Chandler is a fiend! A hound!" he said aloud, but addressing himself. "And a blockhead like this fool of a boy, throwing his life away!"

Suddenly he turned and pointed a stiff arm at me.

"Do you know what they ask at the other posts when they inquire about this fort?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean, do you know what's the first question they ask concerning this place?"

"No, sir, I've no idea. Unless they ask how the fur trade is going."

"Forget the fur trade! They merely ask if anybody has yet been able to kill Butcher Cross, the safety killer!"

"The cowardly hounds!" I shouted. "Give me the name of one of them, and I'll teach him how safely he can call me——"

"Aye, aye, aye!" broke in the marshal. "There's the murder streak cropping out, a mile wide, and red as scarlet."

It silenced me effectually enough. And, as I glared at the marshal, I couldn't help remembering his reputation, which was great and bright along that frontier. There were others who had their enemies, and plenty of them; but there was no man who could point a finger at Marshal O'Rourke and call him anything other than an ideal man of the law, flawlessly honest, brave, gentle, resolute, and with a kind heart beating in his breast. No man was slower to draw a gun than O'Rourke—and no man was slower in putting it up, once drawn. And suddenly I was filled with horror to think that this man, of all the world, should have had to denounce me so bitterly.

"Marshal," I said to him at last, "I never guessed at these things!"

He was silent.

"Mr. O'Rourke," said I, "I want to ask you something more."

"Fire away."

"Why did you come here to-day?"

"To look you in the face and see how old you were. And to tell you that the next man that dies under your gun serves me as a notice to come and get you in the name of the law as an habitual and merciless killer. And no matter how safe you may play the game, there are courts on this border where you would be made an example!" he concluded.

I shuddered.

For I well knew what some of those border courts were, institutions especially designed to keep peace and a fear of law intact throughout some enormous sweep of prairie and mountains. Courts where the stern judges judged by common sense and not by the letter of the law.

If I were known as an habitual kil-

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ler, what would happen to me in such a tribunal?

As an habitual killer? And suddenly, looking back over the years which I had lived through so innocently, as I thought, I could recall a procession of strained, agonized faces, beginning with the freckle-nosed boy on that day when I had finally beaten him to his knees and made him confess that he had had enough. And there were other faces of men, young or in the hardy prime of life, rough-bearded, unkempt, whole-hearted fighters, heated with liquor almost all of them, while I was sure to be cold and steady of nerve. They had rushed into quarrels. They had thrust themselves forward like fools, and my gun had brought them down!

Oh, I had no remorse for the honest fighting of the war trails. And even in this fighting within doors, God could witness that I had never taken an unfair advantage. But now I could remember that when the other man made a motion toward a weapon, my heart had never failed to leap high with joy!

God forgive me for it!

"Marshal!" I gasped.

"Well?"

"If you were me——" I began.

"What would I do?" the marshal interrupted.

"Yes."

"How much money have you?"

"About four thousand dollars."

"A fortune! You've had no bad habits to spend your money on!"

"No, sir," said I.

"Never drank or smoked, even?"

"No, sir. Smoked a very little."

"My lad, I would leave this part of the country and never show my face here again until I'd proved myself the right kind of a man in a new part of the country! I'd go, and never come back until I'd washed my hands clean with honest living!" the marshal advised me.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL ABOARD!

I THOUGHT of Uncle Steve Larkin, first of all. I thought of the way in which he had trained me for a life on the plains, and it hardly seemed possible that he could have made such a terrible mistake about me.

"I want to believe you, marshal," said I.

"And what keeps you from it?"

"Steve Larkin, is he the right kind of a man?" I demanded.

"You don't have to glare at me when you say that," and the marshal smiled. "As a matter of fact, Steve Larkin is one of the best fellows in the world. I see what's going on in your mind. Why doesn't Steve see that you're wrong? Because honest Steve can hardly suspect any one of being anything except what everybody ought to be. How could he suspect you? I know what he's done. He's had the schooling of you. And the fine old chap grows maudlin when he tells how you hit a running antelope at long range; I've seen tears in his eyes when he told about the way you crawled into the cave of the mountain-lion last year and dragged the brute out, dead. I've seen him stand up before a room filled with men and describe with gestures how he taught you to box, and knocked you head over heels until you learned the tricks. And I've seen him show the wrestling holds you had to practice until the day when you laid him on his back! But, my lad, he didn't watch the faces of his audience, or else he would have stopped talking!"

"He would?"

"Yes," said the marshal. "He only knew that they were interested. But there are different kinds of interest, and those frontiersmen set their teeth and watched him through narrowed eyes while he talked. For every man was saying to himself, 'That's the way

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that young Sammy Cross was turned into a safety killer, was it?' "

"Don't use that word!" I shouted. "If they want to see killing, I'll step out and——"

I stopped myself.

The marshal was squinting at me. And he was nodding in the way that I had come to hate.

"Why, lad," said he, "I understand, of course. You're not the first gun fighter that I've had to study. I've seen crowds of 'em and of all kinds. But I never saw one with a handier start in the wrong direction. Don't you see? You've got the killing lust in you. Some men like to shoot buffalo, and some like to trap beaver. But you like to kill and trap men, and you've made yourself so expert that to you it isn't really a danger. It's only a game with you! Don't argue and back-talk. Admit that it's the truth. Fighting is your game!"

I started to give him a quick and hot reply, but checked myself in time. For suddenly I could see that there was truth in what he had said. I had been deluding myself into the belief that in staying on with Chandler I had been fulfilling the wishes of my dear mother; but, as a matter of fact, I had been kept there simply as a sort of watchdog, enjoying the chances for trouble!

"Sit down by yourself and think these things over," said the marshal. "I don't want to press you. I have no right to talk to you as I have talked. But I think that you're too good a youngster to stand by while you throw yourself away."

With that, he walked out of the store; and a moment later Chandler came in, a little tipsy, and singing to himself. He slapped me on the shoulder and asked me how things were running.

"We're going to have some fun today," said he. "That Canuck trapper that bought the rifles last year is back in town and he swears that you cheated him. They were those old army guns, varnished up to look new. You remember?"

"I didn't know that they'd been varnished up to look new," I confessed.

"Well," said Chandler, "you never suspect anything. Let *me* do the thinking, and you do the selling, my lad. That's the best way. But that Canuck is foaming and raging all over town. Be ready for him, old boy. I wouldn't miss the party when he comes in to stamp on the 'keed,' as he calls you!"

"Chandler," I said suddenly, "I'm going to quit."

"Hey! What?" he shouted. "Quit what?"

"Quit the business. I'm leaving Fort Bostwick!"

He leaned back against the counter and gaped at me.

"It's O'Rourke," he said softly to himself. "That hound always has hated me. It's O'Rourke!"

He said more loudly, "Sammy, what's wrong?"

"I'm tired," said I, "of being the watchdog. I'm going into another line of business."

Well, his face blackened wonderfully fast and wonderfully dark, and then he said sharply, "I understand. The pay isn't enough. But tell me what youngster you know of that's been making the income that you have, and salted away so much coin?"

I didn't answer. I simply shook my head.

"But you're valuable to me," said Chandler, "and more than that, I'm fond of you. Why, boy, I look on you the way that a father looks on a son! Who could I leave my money and my business to except to you, eh? And I'll tell you what, I'll raise you, Sammy, to two thousand dollars!"

Two thousand dollars! It was a lot of money in those days.

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Perhaps if I had been a little older, I would have been more tempted but, to a youngster, money is hardly more than a name. I said, "There's no use talking, Mr. Chandler, I've made up my mind," and with that I started to leave the room.

He shouted after me, "Sammy, you've gone mad. I'll raise you higher! Why, it's like losing my own boy! I'll give you twenty-five hundred a year!"

Well, that offer did stagger me a bit. And yet, when I came to think of it, I could remember how many thousands he was taking in each year. He was growing rich, or would have grown rich if he could have kept away from monte and faro. But the gambling took his coin away almost as fast as he took it in.

"Money doesn't talk to me," I told him, and went straight to my room.

There I took out from the mattress the whole four thousand dollars that I had saved. I subtracted two hundred and fifty dollars for expenses. The rest I put in a big envelope, and wrote this note to Marshal O'Rourke:

DEAR MR. O'ROURKE: I'm not taking much time to think things over. You're an older and a wiser man than I am, and I believe that you've talked to me for my own good, and the result is that I'm going to follow your advice at once. The first thing I'm doing is sending you the money that I've saved here. I feel that it's been a dirty business, and that I don't want the coin I've saved here. I want you to take this money and spend it where you think it will do the most good. There's the Widow Callahan, whose husband I killed two years ago. I know that she's been having a hard time with her family, and she's been steadily in want. Well, give her some of this. And there are a lot of others who have suffered on account of me. God forgive me for the evil things that I have done! I just begin to realize them, and it makes me feel like a lost soul.

Keep a good thought for me, yourself, and I shall try to live up to what you may hope.

Faithfully yours, SAMUEL CROSS.

I had just finished that when Mr. Chandler rapped at my door.

"It's no good, sir," I said to him. "I'm not going to argue the matter with you."

"Sammy, Sammy!" he shouted through the door, his voice trembling with earnestness. "I beg you to think it over a little bit!"

"I've thought it over and I won't change."

"Just open the door!"

"No, Mr. Chandler. I'm saying good-by to you, now," I told him.

"Sammy, I've decided that I'll impoverish myself in order to keep you. I wouldn't know what to do with my life, if I didn't have you here. I'll pay you three thousand dollars a year, my lad! That's just the same as making you the senior partner!"

I could hardly believe my ears. Three thousand dollars a year! And then a burst of rage came hot over me. I must have been making this man rich, and yet he wouldn't pay me a tithe of my value to him until I put my thumb down and squeezed him. Three thousand dollars a year!

"Mr. Chandler," I said, "ten thousand a year wouldn't keep me here another day!"

"You ingrate," he screamed in a fury. "This is my reward for taking you out of the gutter and making you a man! This is my reward, is it? Well, I hope that you live to repent your ingratitude."

And he turned and stamped down the hall and down the rickety stairs.

I was rather glad that he had flown into a tantrum. It soothed my feelings about leaving him in the lurch so suddenly. I packed a big carpet bag, put on my best suit, with a couple of revolvers dropped deftly into the clothes in holsters that were slung under the pits of my arms. Then, so equipped, I walked down the stairs and out the back door.

I stopped at the hotel and left my fat envelope for the marshal. After

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that, I went on toward the dock, half-running, because I had remembered that the boat was due to start down the river that morning. The snow was falling in gusts and flurries that pressed like white moths' wings, softly and coldly, against my face; but I headed straight on until I could see the tall shadow of the steamer's smokestack through the snow-mist.

I took a ticket at the office and walked aboard. I had the last berth in the last stateroom; and, thirty seconds after I got aboard, the moorings were cast off, and we warped out into the current.

That moment the snow stopped falling, and on the dock I saw Chandler hurrying up and down and waving his arms. He sighted me at the same instant, and he shouted, "Sammy! Sammy! Come back! I'll make it all right for you! Everything shall be the way that you want it!"

I stepped to the rail and thundered back at him "Mr. Chandler, I thank you for your kindness. But I've had my eyes opened. I'm through. Good-by!"

"You fool! You fool!" he screeched at me, "you'll be inside a prison inside of three months! And I hope that you are! I hope that you are!"

I saw some of the passengers looking quizzically from him to me, so I turned my back and walked to the farther side of the steamer; and the roar of the engine a moment later cut off all the sounds from the shore.

CHAPTER V.

A LONG SHOT.

HOWEVER, as the boat pulled down the stream, cutting along fast with the current behind her, Fort Bostwick came into view again and I looked the place over hungrily, wondering if I should ever forget it.

No, I have never forgotten. I remember perfectly the square shoulders of the fort itself rising above the huddle of houses, which surround it like children pressing to its knees for protection. Protection from the nakedness of the plains that slipped away on all sides. Protection from the dangers of the mountains that piled rough castles of blue in the north and west. I think that I could sit down and draw the whole thing now, if I had any craft for such an art. I could put in the special color of each roof, and the degree of blackness which weather had given to each unpainted shack; and I think that the last thing that I saw was the major's favorite gray mare on top of the hill near the river, for the snow had not yet driven her in to seek shelter. Very bleak and desolate she looked on the crest of that hill against the dark, smoky, rolling sky—bleak and desolate as my own heart felt in my breast.

And it was well that I remembered the fort so perfectly, for I was never to be able to refresh my recollection. I never laid my eyes upon it again; no, nor upon the whole section of the mountains around it. Other portions of the West I was to know, but my immediate past was wiped out. A new life lay before me.

How new and strange that life was to be, I hadn't the slightest guess at that moment. But I knew that my soul had turned to the thinnest sort of air when a man paused by me. I looked at him and saw that he was smiling. And then I saw the clerical collar which he wore, and the black hat, and the robe.

Though my religion was not his, yet I could not help feeling that there was a wonderful understanding and kindness in his eyes.

"A year from to-day, my boy," said he, "you will wonder if you were ever really unhappy in your life! What has sorrow to do with your broad

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shoulders? Shrug it off! Shrug it off!"

He walked on. I found out afterward that he was nursing a sick companion, so I didn't see him again in the whole course of our trip down the river. But those words of his remained with me.

That night was wretched enough. But in the morning, the sun was glistening outside the stateroom window. Through the port I saw that we had passed beyond the area of the storm; and the familiar brown fields stretched away on either hand, for the banks of the river were very low here, and the tide more than reasonably high.

My good cheer came back to me at once and, after I had washed and shaved, I walked up and down the deck, ready to smile at the world, if need be, with no qualms of spirit.

About mid-morning, we ran into a section of buffalo herd, swimming the stream. They swam sluggishly and, according to their nature, paid not the slightest heed to the big boat which was steaming down on them. The captain had to reverse his engines and, backing water all the time, he let the current steal us forward inch by inch through the crowd of swimmers. The passengers were in a great state of excitement. And I saw a tenderfoot fire bullet after bullet into the herd, and yell with joy as he saw the dead ones go down. He couldn't use the meat, he couldn't stop to take the robes. It wasn't even sport. Simply contemptible butchery. But no one spoke to him. A few of the true plainsmen shrugged their shoulders, but that was all.

In the meantime, there was another commotion on the bridge of the boat, and I heard some vague words about a white buffalo. I had seen two white robes. And I had watched the Indians pay fabulous prices for them; for, of course, the tribe which can sacrifice a white buffalo robe to the sun is sure to have good fortune in war and hunting for years to come! But I had never seen a white buffalo, and so I ran up to the bridge without asking permission.

The captain was in a great state of excitement. And, looking in the direction in which he pointed, I was able to see the big bull, a beautiful dazzling white, for he was fresh from his bath in the river. He was rambling on across the plains, with hundreds of his fellows around him, but his color, or perhaps it was his great size, made him stand out above the rest.

"I'd give five hundred for that robe!" cried the captain. "I'd give nearly that much for the mask alone!"

And he stopped the boat and ordered the skiff to be lowered over the side.

It seemed to me odd that no one attempted to shoot the bull. I pointed out to the captain that, by the time the skiff reached shore, the bull would probably be out of range, and the men had no horses with which to follow. He agreed, with a groan, and then, leaning over the rail, he begged some one on board to take a chance at a long-distance shot to bring down the quarry.

"There's Sam Cross standing beside you," said a passenger. "He's about as good as the next one with a rifle."

The captain whirled around on me, and he didn't have to ask me twice. I got them to bring me three rifles, loaded. Three of exactly the same make and weight and caliber. Uncle Steve had taught me the trick. You get your aim with the first bullet as nearly as you can; then, if you make an error, you can try to correct it a little with the second shot, and the third one gives you a really good chance, even at a great distance.

If only the bull didn't bolt!

I took a careful aim, with the captain dancing about me and begging me to shoot quickly, because he pointed out that the bull was moving away

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every second. The first shot was fired, and the captain groaned, and so did half of the passengers. There was such interest in that queer hunt.

But the white bull wasn't touched. I thought that I had fired a little to the right and short; and, sure enough, while the white bull remained unconcerned, a cow near him whirled around and started plunging and fighting.

I corrected my aim quickly, and setting my teeth I slammed the second shot. Straight at him, but a little short, I suppose. The third time I tried and, by this time, I was holding the piece in the air at such a sharp angle that it seemed impossible to strike the mark. It *was* impossible—had not Uncle Steve given me a tremendous schooling in range-finding.

At any rate, after I fired the third shot, everything went on as before. I was shooting from such a distance, and the banks of the river so shut in the noise of the explosions, that the buffalo paid no attention, except the wounded cow. The white bull walked straight on after the third shot, and the captain yelled "Man the boat!"

Just then the white chief paused, swung his head from side to side, and dropped suddenly to his knees.

"He's hit!" screamed a hundred throats. And then, "A kill! A kill!"

For, sure enough, the white bull had toppled over on his side.

Well, it was a great shot, and I was as vain and as flattered as could be at having managed it. But of course there was a whacking lot of luck about the thing.

You see, that bullet had been fired at such an angle that it caught the bull just behind the horns and, glancing down, broke his neck. He had gone on a few automatic paces. But when he dropped, he was stone dead.

They rowed ashore, got the hide off, and the mask, and brought them back to the boat; and the captain wanted to pay me anything that I would name. But I didn't want money. I felt, somehow, that any money I made out of skill with weapons was poisoned. I thanked him and told him that it was the best sport I had ever had.

I want to be forgiven for having insisted in such detail on the way I shot that buffalo, because I freely admit that it sounds a great deal like boasting. However, as a matter of fact, I have to tell about the thing, because it has a bearing on the moment which was the turning point of my life, as you'll learn later on.

At any rate, my not taking money from the captain was a pretty good thing for me in a great many ways. After that, there was nothing that he wouldn't do for me, and all the passengers were extremely cordial. On the third day after the shooting affair, an old, nut-brown fellow, took hold of my arm, gave it a squeeze and said to me: "Kid, they been lying to me about you back there at the fort. You ain't no safety killer, and you never could have been. I know the type too well, and you ain't it!"

I couldn't give him an answer, of course, but it almost choked me with anger and with shame to hear him say it. I wanted to go back and murder the whole civilian population at Fort Bostwick. And yet, another mean moment of reflection told me that the report had been right, and I had been the lowest hound in creation.

Now we drifted down the river, making pretty good time. It was a jolly company, because people who go West are apt to feel a little desolate and dreary; but people going back East are like country folks headed for town. They expect fun and excitement.

So we all became jolly and comfortable, and the men were calling each other by their first names, and the few women aboard were very friendly, except to one another; and, as for me, I

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grew so good-natured that I wandered into a game of monte, and lost every penny that I had except a souvenir five-dollar gold piece.

It made me gloomy for a little while, but the very next day we came to the end of our trip; and I was so excited over seeing the waters of the Mississippi for the first time that I forgot all about my bad luck.

The captain made me take fifty dollars. So I left him one of my rifles as part payment for the loan, and went through the town to see the sights. I woke up in the morning broke again and ready to admit that Chandler had sheltered me from a great many of the dangers of the world—and kept me from a great deal of knowledge of it, too.

In fact I was as raw a greenhorn as ever came out of the wilderness, when I first looked at the muddy, sliding current of the Mississippi.

I had intended trying to press straight across the continent and get to one of the big Eastern cities: Philadelphia, Boston, New York, they were only names to me, and I really didn't care which one of them I landed in.

So I went down with my bag to the edge of the river where the boats were at the docks, and there fortune took the game in hand and sent me in a direction of which I had never thought.

CHAPTER VI.

A BALEFUL INFLUENCE.

THERE was a great deal going on along the wharf, especially the loading of the last of the cargo into the hold of a ship. The cargo, of course, was chiefly bales of buffalo skins; tons and tons of them still had to be worked in. Sailing time was close at hand; the baggage of the passengers were being brought aboard; and the passengers themselves were going up the gangplank, now and then.

Every once in a while, a red-faced man with an officer's cap would come to the rail and shout down to the dock: "Rogers! Rogers! Where's that Rogers?"

And then, from somewhere in the knot of toiling negroes and half-breeds who were doing the labor, a great voice would bellow: "Aye, aye, sir! Here!"

"Rogers, confound you, why do you let those lazy hounds go to sleep like this?"

And Rogers would call back, "Sorry, sir, but I'm trying to do my best!"

"Your best ain't good enough!" the captain would thunder back. "I won't stand for this, Rogers! Stir up those rascals!"

And the mate would turn and berate the men with the most terrible words.

And what a vocabulary he had! I had heard some of the most eloquent cursing in the world done in the open plain, where the language was as free as the men; but I had never, I am sure, heard such talk as flowed from the lips of the mate of that Mississippi steamer. He had a word for every shade of rage and disgust, and an intonation that made his oaths ring far and wide through the confusion. The lash of his tongue whipped every one of those panting workers. I watched, and laughed, and watched again. And suddenly the mate rushed from the turmoil and bellowed to the line of onlookers "Will any of you men lend a hand here, for Heaven's sake? A dollar for one hour's work from any of you!"

There was a mere shrugging of shoulders in answer, for those were "free" plainsmen, and they were not apt to mix with negroes and half-breeds in such labor as this.

But I remembered that my purse was empty, and I could not help starting forward. "I'm willing," I told the mate.

"Bear a hand, then!" he shouted

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and, turning his back to me, he hurried away.

Afterward, when I came to know matters in the South and the whole slave territory better, I could see that I had done a thing sufficient to brand me in the eyes of the upper order of society forever. But at that moment, I was thinking only of the fun and the dollar.

I plunged into the work with all my heart. And soon I was getting such results that even the mate bellowed a word of approval, as he saw me go steaming by in a gang of negroes, all grunting with their task.

The last of the cargo was rapidly cleared from the dock. In the meantime the passengers had gathered and lined the deck to watch; and, as I went aboard under a staggering burden, I heard a man say, "You have poor white trash even this far up the river, captain?"

I glanced aside and saw a tall young fellow of my own height and age, but a bit slenderer, I thought. A small mustache and a bit of pointed beard, glistening black, gave him an air of distinction. I was too hard worked to hate him even with a glance; but still I felt in him the presence of a new civilization. Now and then, I had had glimpses of the gentry of the South at Fort Bostwick but, on the whole, they had been pretty thoroughly reduced to Western ways and habits before I had an opportunity to grow acquainted with them. This tall and splendid youth, with all his white stock wrapped up almost to his ears, his fine coat, and his languid, haughty manner, made me feel that I was a rough barbarian.

However, I lost sight of him in the press of the work. I was enjoying the tussle with the great bales of robes. God had given me muscles, and Uncle Steve had seen the developing of them; and, as a result, I was clad from head to foot in a tangle of power which was a joy to use.

One bale stood on the dock.

"Confound you, Rogers!" shouted the captain, "you've held up these gentlemen and ladies for forty-five minutes!"

No doubt the captain was throwing as much blame as he could on his mate in public, in order to apologize to him in private. But he had been rubbing Rogers the wrong way too long, and finally the mate shouted back: "I've done two men's work in handling the crew of loafers that you hired for me!"

"Proper handling gets results!" answered the captain. "I've seen a five-hundred pound bale carried by one man!"

"Nonsense!" cried the mate. "A bale of skins?"

"The same!"

"Can't possibly be done!" the mate declared.

"Guard your language, Mr. Rogers!" called the captain. "There's a man there that ought to have carried in a bale each trip, if he had the proper handling! *I* would have had him do it!"

Mr. Rogers glared and snorted and turned purple with rage.

"By heaven, sir," he called, "there's one bale left, and there's the man, and you just step down here and make him handle it, now!"

"I have half a mind to!" answered the captain.

"I'll lay you five hundred dollars, captain, that the man can't budge the bale," cut in a voice perfectly cool and good-natured.

It came from one of the black-coated, somber-mannered gentry of the passenger list.

"I'll add another five hundred on my own account," said the mate, "if he can pick up that bale and put it on his back!"

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"Wait one minute!" cried the captain. "I'll see about this."

He hurried down from the deck. There was no talk about delay, now. Not a soul among the passengers demurred, because in those days there was something sacred about a contest that carried bets. It had a measure of precedence given it such as people today will hardly believe.

Approaching the bale of buffalo robes, the captain laid hold of a corner of it and gave a tug. There was hardly a stagger of the bale in response, though the captain was no stripling.

"I suppose that's about enough for you, captain?" asked the gambler.

And a little chuckle followed.

The captain glared at them. His blood was up. He was from Alabama, where blood is easily heated; and, in such a moment as this, with the eyes of his crew and his passengers upon him, with money ready to be wagered, he was half desperate.

He glared at me.

"Speak up!" said he. "Can you shift that bale?"

I shook my head.

"Try, man, try!" said he.

It made me smile to hear such language. Back in Fort Bostwick, where they had called me the safety killer for so many years, certainly no one would have talked quite so freely to me; but, here on the dock, I didn't mind. I gripped the bale and pulled, and it heeled a bit under my grasp.

"I don't know," I said to the captain. "I could lift this bale. But, as for getting it on my back and carrying it into the boat, that's quite another——"

He didn't wait for me to finish. He turned and roared, "Rogers! I'll take your bet. And you, sir. That five hundred of yours is covered!"

There was a little bustle of excitement. In half a minute every soul was rushing from the boat onto the dock to watch the contest. And a thrill of weakness went through me when I thought that I could hardly hope to accomplish this thing. Little things are sometimes strangely greater in importance than in significance. I felt that I wanted to win that wager for the captain more than anything I had wanted in my life since I knelt by the bed of my dead mother.

As for the captain, he was made of good stuff, for now he came to me and said quietly, "Let the crowd gather, lad. Let them come around and see the fun. Take your time, now. You're a bit shaky with the idea. And whether you win or not, there's twenty dollars for you. You get a hundred if you take the bale on board."

I pushed back the twenty.

"I'm trying this for the game," I told him.

His critical eyes flickered up and down my face.

"Have it your own way," he said. "You're a cut above what I thought."

He turned back to the others. "I have another thousand dollars free to bet on this friend of mine," he said to the crowd. "Is that money covered?"

Two more of those black-clothed gamblers hefted the bale and covered the captain's money instantly.

"You were in a hurry to get started, captain," said the mate. "But don't let's hurry you now!"

A little chuckle greeted this sally, but the captain barked, "That'll do from you, Rogers. Are you ready to try your hand, sir?"

"Ready," said I.

There was another whisper at the captain's use of the word "sir;" but I overheard him explain an instant later, "This gentleman will not take a penny. It's a game, to him. And if I had another thousand, I would bet it. But I haven't."

I wanted to protest and tell him that he was mad to wager so rashly, but

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somehow, I knew that no argument would help. Besides, the money had been placed. And it would have taken a strong hand to get a cent of it back from one of the professional gamblers.

I gave word that I was ready, a way was cleared to the gangplank, and I tested my strength on the bale. I heeled it easily over and that brought a shout from the crowd. Then I got a careful grip and brought the bale up hip-high before it slipped and fell back.

After that, I sized it up with more care. It was heavy enough, of course. But any one who has seen expert piano movers at work has seen men bear fully as great a burden as the one I wanted to carry that day. It was simply the clumsy bulk of the thing that made it so hard to carry.

The fall of the bale had brought a groan from those who sympathized with me; and I heard the tall, pale-faced youth with the mustache and short beard saying, "I'd like to place a wager against that man. Will anybody take me?"

I didn't wait for the answer. The calm and haughty superiority of this soft-handed youngster angered me so much that I swore to myself that I would open his eyes that moment. I leaned, took a new grip, and swung up the edge of the bale with all my might.

There is a knack to the handling of anything; and at Fort Bostwick, in the store, I had grown accustomed to the shifting of great weights in skins. I got the bale up hip-high, rested it there until I had my breath and the ache had gone out of my shoulders; and then, with a twist of my body, I brought my shoulders under the edge of the mass.

It slipped and, once down, I knew that I could never raise it again; but I managed to take a finger hold on the edge of the bale that projected over my shoulders. And, by doubling far forward, I was able to keep the bale balanced. It brought a crushing burden on my hips and behind my shoulders. My wind was fairly pressed out of me, but the yelling of the crowd gave me strength, as did the hoarse, triumphant voice of the captain, yelling, "I told you so! Who's betting against him now?"

I went on to the ship well enough until I got to the gangplank; and there the sharp upward slant threw an agonizing strain on the muscles of my legs with every step.

Besides, that gangplank was a slender affair; and each time I stepped forward it sagged with a great groaning. You must understand that the freight gangplank had been drawn in before this! Half way to the edge of the boat, I paused and got my breath back. My legs were beginning to shake crazily under the terrible strain, and there was a sense of numbness from the knees down.

"He's finished!" shouted some one as I paused.

"Shut up!" called the captain. "Give him a chance." And then he added, as I made another painful, sinking step forward, "Lad, don't kill yourself for a bit of foolish money! You're worth more than this bet. Let the bale drop!"

His words gave me a sudden strength. I made the four or five steps that were necessary to reach the edge of the boat and, turning a bit, I tumbled the great bale onward. It fell with a heavy thud, and a little cloud of dust rose from it. Relieved from the burden, I gripped the rail and stood with hanging head, wondering if the blood would burst through my temple—such was the thundering of my pulses!

CHAPTER VII.

A KNIFE IN THE DARK.

THAT had been a dirty job, wrestling with the bales of hides; and one could understand why white men stood back and left the work for

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negroes and half-breeds. But having been raised out on the plains, color didn't make a great deal of difference to me. On the long trails hunting, it was a small matter what color skin a man wore; but it was a great matter to find a man at all and exchange the the time of day with him. Around a camp fire one was as apt to hear pleasant yarns from an Indian brave as from any white man. So what difference did it make to me that the other whites along the wharf had stood back and refused to work on the dock at the moving of the hides? I had gone in for it head over heels, as you may say; and now I stood on the deck grasping the rail, perspiration pouring down my face, covered with the dust, and filth of the hides, and their none too fragrant odor in a cloud around me.

Sun-blackened by the life on the plains, I suppose that I looked as much like a negro, or a half-breed at least, as any man ever looked in this world. But nevertheless, it made me rage when one of the gamesters who had lost money betting against me strolled past with a sneer on his lips and a shrug of his shoulders.

"I thought I was betting against a white man," said he.

There were others coming close around me, men, and women, too, and the captain shouldering through the crowd with a happy face. I reached out through them and caught the gambler by the arm.

"You can't talk to me like that," I told him.

He whirled around at me with a snarl.

"Keep your hands off me, you black dog!" he snapped, and reached for the butt of a pistol which showed under his armpit as he swung about and his coat flapped open. It would have been an easy thing to beat him to the shot for, from his first movement, I knew that he was no such expert as my Uncle Steve had made me through long and cruel hours of practice. But, after my talk with the marshal, I had determined to change my attitude toward fighting. I would never take life if I could avoid it. And here there was no need at all. The jaw of the gambler was just within good arm's length, and a clenched fist can beat the fastest gun that was ever pulled. My left was back, so I let him have that neatly on the button, and the blow drove him backward through the crowd and sent him rolling under their feet.

There was only a grunt from the captain as he came up. "That served the puppy right. You come on with me, my lad," he said.

He took me through the gaping crowd into his own cabin, which was finer in its furnishings than the best room I had ever seen in my life, which was the major's quarters at Fort Bostwick. The mahogany deck seemed to me like a precious red-brown jewel, it was polished so brightly. There was a gay rug on the floor, too; the steamboat man made enough money on his trips to satisfy his flamboyant tastes.

He sat me down and dragged out a bottle of whisky. I took a mere nip, and my eyes opened.

"Aye, aye," grunted the sailor. "That's real, eh? It ain't the kind of thing that you've had out there on the plains?

"Alcohol and quicklime is what they give you out there," said he. "But this is good for you. Take another drink. Take a real one."

I wouldn't do that, and I explained to him that I'd formed the habit of being a one-drink man. You had to form that habit around a trader's store, unless you wanted to be robbed outright by the first sharpster that came along to make a trade. And besides, the whisky on the plains was such filthy stuff that I'd only been able to down it now and then. The idea of

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drinking, you see, had never been made attractive to me.

"All right," said the captain. "Then here's a go to you, and looking in your eyes, my beauty!"

He tilted the big bottle at his lips, and I swear that I thought he would never take it down. More than a half pint of the raw stuff must have flowed down his throat before he lowered the bottle again. Yet there was not even a moisture in his eyes. He smacked his lips, corked the bottle with a sigh, and put it away in a drawer of his desk. That drawer closed with a promising clinking of more glassware.

"That's real," he repeated. "But for me, I never take a real drink before six in the evening. It ain't safe. No, not safe at all, with a ship under your command. That's the disadvantage of a captain's life on this infernal river. But now about you. I've cleaned up a tidy sum on your bit of work. And I have five hundred dollars for you here."

He started counting out the gold in handfuls. I stopped him at once.

"I don't want it," said I.

"But you earned it," he protested.

"No, I don't want it. It would really spoil the fun of the game for me."

"Will you shake on that?"

I smiled and shook hands with him. He turned my palm up.

"You never got your strength out of manual labor," he said at once. "Then how in time *did* you get it?"

"I don't know," said I. "Chiefly it came by nature, I suppose."

"Tell me," said the captain suddenly, "where you are bound for?"

"Somewhere East," I answered.

"New York?" he suggested.

"Perhaps."

"What would you do there?"

"I don't know that, either," I told him.

"And then, why not South?"

"There's no reason, except that I hadn't thought about it."

"Think about it now. Come down the river with me to New Orleans. I like you, my boy. And I think that I could introduce you to some men who would push you ahead into a good position. Understand, I've no old family, and I got no great lot of money, either. But I know some real gentlemen, fancy stuff! They could use a man like you."

I turned the matter back and forth in my mind.

"Why not?" said he, urging me.

"There's no reason against it," I decided.

"Then stay aboard this boat."

"Wait till I get my bag," I remarked.

"Cut and run for it. We're an hour late!"

I ran for it, willingly enough, bounded down the gangplank, and was back in a trice with all my belongings. The last moorings were cast off, the big paddle wheels began to beat the water, and out into the current we shot and headed down the river.

I was rather glad of it. The world seemed just then a friendly place to me; and I hardly cared in what direction I floated, for I felt that to make one's way was an easy matter.

I idled on the boat from stem to stern and from top to bottom. As I sat by the engineer, it seemed to me that there was nothing in the world quite so wonderful and splendid and such a proof of the gigantic powers of man as that old river scow. Wherever I went on the ship, I was made welcome, because the people had seen the lifting of the big bale, and they were glad to talk to me. I had supper with the second engineer and the second and third mates, who were all very kind and promised to show me the sights of New Orleans, when we finally arrived.

Afterward, I went out into the

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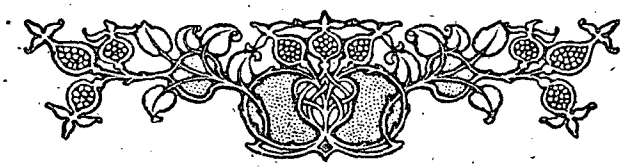
darkness and sat near the prow, listening to the rushing of the bow wave, and watching the lights along the shores slip softly back behind us into the deep darkness of the night. Finally, I stood up with my hands clasped behind me, and let the wind comb against my face and through my hair. It was a glorious, free feeling. And suddenly I asked myself why I should not be a sailor, and learn the great wide seas and the huge steamers that traversed them?

There was no reason. The world was mine, and I was foot free to go wherever I chose!

The idea fascinated me more and more; and, with a smile and a light heart, I was committing myself to a life on the bounding waves, when I heard a sharp cry behind me, and whirled in time to see the dark outline of a man not two steps to the rear of me, with the light from the forecastle glimmering faintly on a bowie knife which was gripped in his hand.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



STATE FLOWERS OF THE WEST

The Pasque Flower—South Dakota

SOME claim that the lovely pasque flower, queen of South Dakota, is a direct descendant of an English beauty. Certain it is that the resemblance is truly unique. There is an old tradition that the plant sprang first from the blood of Danes spilled on the battlefield in the early days of England's romantic history. This legend has christened the blossom Danesblood.

As to how our variety acquired its title, opinions differ. Some believe that it was bestowed because the flower is the most plentiful of all the Easter blooms; the word "pasque" is derived from a term which, with slight variation, forms the word Easter in all of the Romance languages. Another theory holds that the purple petals formed the base for a dye used to color Easter eggs.

The pasque flower is one of the earliest blooming plants in the region it decorates—a region which covers a vast territory, ranging from Illinois to the Rocky Mountains, and from Canada to Texas. In March and April its soft purple hues shade the landscape. The leaves of the plant are so furry—a means of protection against the depredations of ants and other insects—that the children of South Dakota call it the "gosling plant." A head of silky seeds with fluffy, fragile plumes led other people to give it the name of ground clematis.

The pasque flower belongs to the anemone group, a family with one marked peculiarity. After the blossom appears, the stem lengthens incredibly. Even when cut and put in water the plant manufactures, from nothing more than water, air, and sunlight, cells sufficient in number to double the length of the slender stalk.

In 1903, the legislature gave to this little purple posy, the pasque flower, the additional appellation of State flower of South Dakota.

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Shadowed Shot

by John H. Hamlin

Author of "Trouble on the Rattletrap," etc.

CHAPTER I.

GAMBLING DEBTS.

WITH a vicious twist of his spurred boot, Perry Gartland shoved his chair back from the card table and got to his feet. He gulped his resentment as best he could and assumed an air of bravado, while Seth Varney added the figures penciled on a slip of paper.

"I trimmed yuh for five hundred and thuty dollars, Perry. Got that much cash on yuh?" he asked.

"Do you think that I'm a walkin' mint?" jeered Gartland, forcing a laugh.

"Then slap yuhr I O U on this paper." Varney's purplish-dyed beard waggled and he pushed the paper across the table, laying a battered fountain pen alongside it.

"Don't seem like I could've lost much as that at one settin', Varney," protested young Gartland, scowling at the paper and making no move to sign it.

"Waal, yuh seen me jot down my winnin's, didn't yuh?" There was a twanging note of greed in the older man's voice, a hard glitter in his pale, gray eyes. "If yuh'd pay me what yuh already owe me, 'ste'd of tryin' to git it back by trimmin' me at poker, yuh'd be better off all round."

"Yeah?" sneered Perry Gartland. "Easier said than done, Varney. How much, all told, do I owe you, anyhow?"

Seth Varney evaded answering that question. He edged pen and paper nearer to Gartland. "Sign it, young feller! There's no gittin' out of it," he commanded.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Perry reached for the pen and scribbled his signature. The letters were bold in outline, though irregular, and trailed across the paper in a downward slant. His writing confirmed his facial characteristics, brazen eyes and an irresolute chin. He could put up a good

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bluff, but weakened when it came to a show-down. He played poker that way, too; and Seth Varney gloated inwardly, as he folded the small slip of paper and tucked it carefully within the maw of his fat wallet. He had a shrewd knack of knowing just when to call Gartland's bluffs.

"Now, look here, Perry, I been lettin' yuh slide purty easy since yuhr father died. If yuh ain't kept track of what yuh've lost, that's yuhr affair, but my idea's different," Varney remarked, as he extracted a memorandum from his wallet. "Outside my winnin's today, yuhr I O Us tote up to four thousand six hundred and fifty dollars even." A covetous smirk twitched Varney's rather full lips, showing behind his dyed mustache and beard. "That's considerable of a figger. Time yuh was settlin' up in full," he remarked.

"Yeah? How do you want it, greenbacks or gold?" Gartland demanded, his chin trembling, and thus belying his fixed and brazen stare.

"If yuh can't raise the cash, there's another way which'll suit me all right," remarked Varney, cautiously stowing his wallet into his breast pocket.

"I get you, Varney; but you know as well as me that that can't be done," Perry replied, as he took the makings from his hip pocket and nervously rolled a brown-paper cigarette.

"I ain't to be put off no longer, Perry!" Varney's voice was harsh and insistent. "I'm gittin' plumb sick o' bein' stalled off. If yuh don't raise that five thousand dollars before the week's out, I'll plaster a lien on yuhr ranch, understand?"

"Fat lot of good a lien on the Tumbling Rock'll do you, Varney," sneered Gartland, blowing a puff of blue smoke into a ring, which floated to the low ceiling of the pool-and-card room in the Sagehen Hotel.

"Some more of yuhr bluffin', but I'm callin' the turn, Perry. Yuh pay off them I O Us inside of a week one way or t'other. Reckon yuh know that I ain't one to waste words," Varney threatened.

"I can't round up that much money in six weeks, let alone one," declared Gartland, tossing his half-smoked cigarette to the floor. "And you know, too, how the old man doped out his crazy will. I can't raise a nickel on the Tumbling Rock unless Sue agrees to it. And Sue won't, not for any gamblin' debts, I'm here to tell you."

"So? Then I'll have a talk with Sue." Varney's gray eyes narrowed, and his lips tightened into an ugly line. "That don't go with me, Perry. Yuh can't dodge payin' me by hidin' behind yuhr sister. I'm demandin' a settlement, and I'm gonna git it." Seth Varney jerked out of his chair, strode past the bar without looking at the trio of cowboys watching him, and disappeared through the street door.

Perry Gartland rolled another cigarette, tried to seal the flap, spilled the tobacco out of the paper, and swore. "Curse his skinflint hide!" he muttered savagely. Then, with another oath, he tore the paper into bits and joined the cowboys at the bar.

He motioned them to line up and roughly accosted the barkeeper.

"Give me the stiffest drink that you got on tap, Bob." Turning to the others, he added curtly, "Name your poison, fellers."

Perry gulped his rank drink in a single swallow, demanded a second and third in rapid succession, with two of the cowboys keeping pace with him.

"Chalk up the score against me, Bob," snapped Perry to the barkeeper. "What's eatin' you, 'Spur'?" He glared at the third cowboy, who hadn't drained his first glass. "Feelin' too danged virtuous to drink with me, huh?" he demanded.

"Nope, just doubtful of this brand of firewater." Spur Wendel, top hand of

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the "Tumbling Rock Ranch" since before the death of Perry Gartland's father, smiled, with his lips but not his eyes; as he met the domineering look of his young boss.

"La-de-da, but ain't we perticular all of a sudden!" There was a nasty slur in Perry's manner of speaking. "Well, I'm goin' to stick round town for a spell. You boys do as you durned please. See you later," Perry Gartland remarked, as he wheeled away from the bar and hastily stamped out of the room.

"I'm going back to the ranch. You boys coming along?" Spur Wendel questioned the two punchers.

"What? And the boss allowin' that we kin do as we durned please?" "Slim" Dines nudged his companion with his elbow. "I'm for seein' the village by night, so's Sammy. But we ain't cravin' yuhr company, Spur; hey, Sammy?" he asked his friend.

"Not if he's feelin' pious. Let's beat it over to the 'Sassy Jane,' Slim. S'long, Spur." Sammy Ennis grinned wickedly at Slim.

"You'd better show up early in the morning, boys. There's a lot of work left undone on the ranch," said Spur, keeping an even temper.

"Is that so?" jeered Slim Dines. "Then s'posin' yuh flies at it, Spur. Besides, we know that yuh're fair bustin' to spend a cozy li'l evening with the boss' sister without us hornin' in. Yuh can't fool an old hoss fly, Spur." Slim Dines spoke with marked sarcasm.

"Maybe not, Slim, but I've knocked the head plumb off several hoss flies which buzzed round too familiarly." Spur's brown eyes flashed a warning at Slim Dines.

"Is that so?" Slim came back at him. "Waal, mebbe yuh won't be buzzin' round the Tumblin' Rock much longer, yuhrself."

Sammy chortled at this crack, hooked his arm through that of Slim, and the pair of them jangled out of the barroom, bound for the "Sassy Jane Chophouse."

A trace of resentment hardened Spur Wendel's eyes. He waited till the clink of their spurs died out, then went out into the street, turning off the main thoroughfare and going up a side alley. He stopped at a hitching rail, flanking the hotel building. A short-coupled, bay pony lifted an intelligent head and nickered at his approach.

"Hankerin' for the home corral, 'Bo?'" Spur slapped the pony affectionately on the rump, adjusted and tightened the cinch, flipped the bridle reins over the horn, and swung into the saddle.

It was early September, and the sun was nearing the western rim of hills. Spur glanced at his watch.

"Five o'clock. Sue rings the supper gong at six sharp. We've got to ramble, Bo." He leaned slightly forward, pressing his knees against the saddle, while the pony broke into an easy lope which took them quickly beyond the limits of the little cow town. "A shame, Bo, lettin' a girl stick on that big ranch all by her lonesome. Stretch your legs, old hoss. Seems like the boss is sore at me, Bo; them others, too. But we should worry, s'long as Sue's got a smile for me," he reflected.

There was no wind blowing. The feathery puffs of red dust, kicked up by the pony's hoofs, lingered in a trailing veil over the road that stretched across the sage flat. The slanting rays of the sun played upon the wavering dust cloud, changing it into shimmering tints of reddish gold and burnished copper. Spur Wendel didn't look over his shoulder, so missed the unusual spectacle. His thoughts were flying ahead of him, picturing Sue Gartland bustling about in the kitchen of the Tumbling Rock Ranch.

Topping a sage-grown hillock, a couple of miles out of town, Spur saw

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a horseman proceeding up the far slope of the draw.

"Seth Varney!" muttered the cowboy. "Perry's a plumb idiot to set in on a poker game with that ornery old fox. Varney'll spring a trap on him, sure's shootin'." Spur shook his head dolefully. Just once had he offered a bit of advice to his reckless young boss. But Perry hadn't minced words in telling Spur that he wasn't paying him good wages to interfere with his private affairs. And ever since that occasion, less than a month following the elder Gartland's fatal accident, while riding a half-broken colt, there had been a decided coolness in Perry's attitude toward his top hand. Slim Dines and Sammy Ennis weren't slow in showing their dislike for Spur, for they'd long been jealous of his job. If it hadn't been for Sue Gartland, Spur would have rolled his blankets and hunted work elsewhere.

Just before he overhauled the more leisurely Varney, a buckboard, drawn by a skittish pair of geldings, bowled up from the next arroyo and Seth Varney reined his horse to one side of the road. He snatched off his sombrero and smirked and bowed profusely at the two girls in the driver's seat. They didn't pull up on the reins, but whirled past the smirking rancher with curt nods. They were giggling, when they waved at Spur Wendel, and rolling their eyes mischievously in the direction of the flirtatious Varney.

"Silly old fossil!" Spur's lips formed the words, but he returned the girls' salutes and urged his pony on at a faster clip, merely nodding his head in recognition of Varney's, "What's yuhr rush, Wendel?"

Spur didn't linger to explain his rush, but spurted ahead of Varney and kept Bo at a fast clip all the way to the Tumbling Rock gates. At a few minutes to six, he was galloping up the lane. The ranch buildings were already blurred in the shadows cast by a shoulder of hills, forming the western boundary lines. On the highest peak, and reflecting the last rays of the setting sun, stood the rock, carved by the elements into a huge misshapen pestle, from which the ranch got its name.

Tumbling Rock, from a distance, appeared to be precariously balanced on its smaller end upon the apex of the jagged peak of volcanic formation. It seemed to teeter on its pedestal, looking as though a breath of wind might send it crashing down the steep hillside. But it had withstood the storms of centuries. And, for thirty years, it had sent the first afternoon shadow creeping over the hill pasture, slowly enveloping the corrals, outbuildings and ranch house in a soft, purple veil.

Spur raised to his tiptoes in the stirrups, eagerly searching the premises for a glimpse of Sue Gartland. When he saw a wisp of smoke curling up from the chimney, he knew that she was busy preparing supper and might step to the side door any moment, expectantly watching for the return of her half-brother and his cowboys.

"Perry hasn't got any right treatin' her like he does," muttered Spur, cantering past the house and heading straight for the barn. He peeled off saddle and bridle and scaled the ladder into the loft, filling the feed racks.

From the barn, he dashed over to the bunk house, soused his face and hands in a basin of cold water, ran a comb through his thick, brown hair and was ready for the supper gong. He was a good-looking young man, not too tall, but sturdily built. His mouth was straight and there was a keen, though kind, expression in his brown eyes.

The clanging of steel against steel reverberated through the peaceful domains of Tumbling Rock Ranch. Spur threw back his shoulders and struck out for the ranch house.

Sue Gartland was leaning against the

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post of the back porch from which was suspended the bent crowbar that served as dinner bell. Clasped in her right hand was the short iron rod with which she had sounded the summons to supper. Her left hand was pressing back tendrils of blue-black hair from her brow.

At first sight, Perry Gartland's half-sister gave one the impression of a drab and spiritless girl. Her brown gingham dress was colorless and unbecoming; her heavy shoes and coarse cotton stockings were worn for service and not style. There was a tired droop to her shoulders; tiny worry lines pulled down the corners of her mouth.

"Howdy, Miss Sue!" Spur Wendel called out cheerily, wanting to dispel that unhappy expression and see the dark-blue eyes light up as they did only on rare occasions since the death of her father. Her mother had died the year before Spur came to the Tumbling Rock.

"Hello, Spur! Where's Perry and the others?" Her voice dragged on final syllables, but she looked at the top hand as though he were gladly welcomed.

"They're stayin' in town, Miss Sue. Won't be home for supper," Spur replied.

"Again?" Just that one word, but it struck a note of dejectedness. The girl dropped the gong clapper upon the porch and entered the door leading into the kitchen.

Spur followed her, his observant glance taking in the stack of five plates in the warming oven, the quantity of steak sizzling in the frying pan, the big pot of potatoes and pan of golden-browned biscuits. A brimming bucket of milk was cooling on a bench near the open window.

"Why didn't you wait and let me milk the cows, Miss Sue?" Spur asked, looking at her reproachfully.

"Milking isn't a top-hand's work," she said, busying herself in filling a plate with steak, potatoes and buttered carrots.

He took it from her and waited a moment.

"You go sit down. I'll be in shortly," she directed. He saw her glance sadly at the cooked food which would go to waste. A frown drew her brows together, and Spur wanted to say something comforting. He didn't, though, but walked sedately into the dining room.

When Sue Gartland took her place at the head of the table, she brought with her just a cup of tea for herself and a plate of biscuits for him.

"Ain't you feelin' well, Miss Sue?" Spur asked. Hungry as he was, he felt the edge of his appetite dulled.

"Too tired, I guess," was all she said, sipping indifferently at the hot tea.

"No sense of you working so hard, Miss Sue. You'd oughta hire somebody to cook and milk the cows," Spur told her.

"Perry says that we have enough hired help as it is," she said, drooping wearily in her chair.

"And a mighty poor crew at that," muttered Spur only half aloud.

"I agree with you," she took him up unexpectedly.

"Seems like you oughta have more authority, being as how you own half interest in the ranch. I hate to see you get all tuckered out, Miss Sue," was the man's comment.

She pushed her half-emptied cup aside and spread toil-stained hands upon the clean tablecloth, while remarking, "Mother always said that a woman's work on a ranch was twice as hard as a man's, and never done at that." The girl wasn't complaining, simply stating what appeared to her to be a fact.

"Well, look at Belle and Jennie Ramage," Spur recalled how fresh and pretty the sisters looked as they

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whizzed past him behind their spanking team. "The Ramage Ranch ain't half what Tumbling Rock is, and those girls don't kill themselves working."

"Maybe I am a fool," sighed Sue Gartland. "I've thought so a lot of times lately."

"No, you ain't a fool, Miss Sue. It's just because you don't demand what's your rights," counseled the top hand encouragingly.

"That would mean a continued fight with Perry," said Sue, shaking her head mournfully.

Spur Wendel stared at her and was puzzled. Didn't she have any spunk? Was she afraid of her half-brother's bluster and abuse? Was she working like a slave just because her mother had done it before her? Spur was astonished, doubly so when Sue suddenly lifted her head and he caught the quick flashing of her eyes, changing them from a dark blue to a deep violet.

"Listen!" she exclaimed, then arose from the table and glided to the door overlooking the yardway. "It's Perry!" She walked slowly back to the table and sat in her chair, while Spur finished eating his piece of pie and drank a second cup of tea.

The clump of spurred boots sounded on the back porch. Spur expected to see Sue jump up in readiness to wait on her brother. But she didn't move from her chair, when Perry Gartland breezed into the dining room.

"Ho, you didn't lose any time gettin' here, Spur!" His bold, black eyes swept over the top hand, as he shifted a brown paper parcel which was tucked beneath his arm. "Through eatin'?" he asked.

Spur nodded.

"Then go put up my horse," was the gruff command.

Spur winced, said nothing, and walked out of the house, Perry glaring at him resentfully.

"How about givin' me my supper, Sue?" He again shifted the paper-wrapped bundle and centered an unwinking stare upon his half-sister.

She didn't make a move, only sat and looked at him out of pathetically weary eyes.

"What ails yuh?" He jerked a thumb at the top hand's place. "I'd say from the looks o' things that Wendel didn't have to set up and beg for his supper."

"He wasn't late," she said dully.

"There's a good reason why I'm late to-night," Perry asserted.

"It'll be the first time that you've had one," she countered flatly.

"Is that so? You're gettin' mighty uppity, ain't you?" He blinked in amazement, yanked back his chair, and sat down. "Well, I brought you a present, Sue." He shoved the parcel across the table toward her.

"You brought *me* a present!" Sue straightened in her chair, her eyes lighting up in surprise. The corners of her mouth lifted, giving to her face a wistfully tender expression. "Why, that's nice of you, Perry," she exclaimed. She reached for the parcel, patting it with the eager curiosity of a child. "What is it?" She half whispered, her fingers plucking at the knots of the string.

"Open it and see," he directed, watching her narrowly.

"Oh, Perry, you're hungry!" She stopped before a single knot had been loosened. "Wait, I'll mend the fire and put things on to warm." She ran out into the kitchen, rattling pots and pans, and humming a gay little tune. In two minutes she was back again, waving a pair of scissors. "There, your supper'll be piping hot in a jiffy. I've simply got to peek right away!" She snipped the strings, tore off the wrappings, and uttered a cry of delight, "Why, Perry Gartland, if you didn't go and buy me a lovely dress!" She threw up her hands, stepped back a pace, and gazed

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unbelievingly upon the shimmering garment.

Very gingerly she lifted it from the paper and held it off at arm's length. "Red silk, and beaded!" she exclaimed. A tiny note of dismay crept into her voice. "Is red my color, Perry? Do you think that I can wear it?" She tucked the yoke of the gown beneath her chin and looked at him doubtfully.

"Sure you can!" He was tapping the floor impatiently with his boot heels. "You'd be pretty as the next one in fine togs. Doll up in that fancy thing, and you'll be a knock-out."

The girl's nostrils dilated. "What's that perfume?" she asked. She drew a fold of the gown to her nose and sniffed; then she examined it more closely. The glad light faded from her eyes. She held the gown away from her, a shoulder strap pinched between her thumb and forefinger.

"Where did you get this dress?" she demanded, looking straight at her half-brother, whose brazen eyes met her own for a moment, then shifted uneasily.

"What's the matter with it? You never owned one half as pretty, did you?" he demanded harshly.

"Just why did you bring it to me?" She was watching him suspiciously.

"I smell something burning. Fetch in my supper, Sue. I'll talk to you while I'm eating." He squirmed in his chair restlessly.

"It's this awful perfume you smell." She turned her head in disgust from the dangling gown of red silk. "And it's stained and spotted. Is this one of your beastly jokes, Perry?" she demanded.

"Joke!" He jumped to his feet. "It's anything but a joke," he shouted. "Look here, Sue, I'm up against it, and you'll be, too, if you don't help me."

"What do you mean?" Sue Gartland's slender shoulders stiffened, while violet sparks darkened the blue of her eyes.

"I'm owing Seth Varney a bunch of money. He's got to be paid. He's threatened to put a lien on the ranch. He'll do it, too, so I've got to raise that money."

"Gambling debts?" the girl inquired.

"Aw, listen, Sue——" her brother began.

"You don't deny it!" Sue Gartland interrupted him sharply, a strange metallic ring coming into her voice. She hastily rolled the red-silk gown into a crumpled ball. "That's why you want me to be attractive, is it? You'd have me doll up in this and vamp that wretched old Seth Varney?" She raised the silken ball with a backward sweep of her arm. "Oh," a dry little sob choked her. "W-what a noble brother you are, Perry Gartland!" Then she hurled the stained and highly-scented garment full into his startled face.

CHAPTER II.

A MUFFLED REPORT.

YOU, you little fool!" Perry Gartland tore the smothering folds of red silk from around his neck and dashed them to the floor. Ugly lights gleamed in his brazen eyes, his chin was trembling with thwarted rage. "Something's got to be done, I tell you! Seth Varney's got to be paid. This concerns you same's me," he exclaimed, advancing a threatening step toward his half-sister.

She didn't flinch. "Oh, is that so?" she flung the defiant words at him.

"It's straight. Once he plasters a lien on this ranch, he'll never let loose —that's him. He's a crafty old skinflint, when doin' business with us men; but a softie, when it comes to a woman. It won't hurt you any, Sue." His wrathful tirade changed to a coarse plea. "You could wrap him round your little finger, once you dolled up fancy and played him for a fool."

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"That's your game, is it, Perry Gartland? I knew that you were crooked, but not rotten to the core." There was the same metallic click to her words, which had startled Perry a few moments earlier. "I've slaved and scrimped and worked twelve hours a day to keep this ranch running," she continued. "Yes, I've worked like a dog, always. But don't ever think that I'll cheapen myself by wearing second-hand finery to soften Seth Varney's miserly heart. I've begged you to quit gambling and to tend to business here. But you hire men to do your share of the work, so that you can gamble and gad about. And this is what happens! Well, it's your debt. It has nothing to do with the ranch. It's up to you to pay it. I shan't help you." Sue Gartland stamped her heavy-soled shoe to silence her brother's furious retort.

"And another thing," she went on, "I'm through being a drudge to you and your men." She lifted a fold of her cheap brown dress. "You say that I'd be pretty as the next one if I dolled up. Very well, I'll burn these old duds, but I shan't wear that horrid, cast-off rag. I'll pick out my own clothes, thank you, and not to wrap skinflints like Seth Varney round my little finger, either."

"Huh, he'll get this ranch sure as shootin', then," Perry commented.

"I haven't signed any papers, so he can't," the girl protested.

"You'll have to," Perry asserted.

"Not to pay your gambling debts, Perry Gartland."

"Listen, Sue, I'm sick and tired of this old ranch, anyhow. Let's sell out. It's more darned trouble'n it's worth," the man began.

"What, sell Tumbling Rock? After dad and mother struggled most of their lives to get it all paid for and improved and everything! They loved every acre of it, Perry Gartland. So do I, so should you. That's why I've been willing to work harder than any hired man, so's to keep out of debt. I'll never, never sell Tumbling Rock Ranch," Sue expostulated.

"What's got into yuh, lately, Sue?" Young Gartland eyed his half-sister searchingly. "That Spur Wendel's been puttin' these notions into your head," he concluded.

"He has not," Sue spiritedly denied. "Those notions have always been there, only I didn't have spunk enough to live up to them, not till you insulted me with that!" She pointed disdainfully to the odorous red-silk gown crumpled on the floor.

"Huh!" A gruff snort. Perry Gartland was stumped at this suddenly rebellious sister. Neither his own mother nor his stepmother had ever flared up like this. They had worked as hard as Sue, at that. To Perry, that was what a rancher's wife should do and be uncomplaining about it. He shook his head, paced the length of the room, and then came back to the table and slumped into his chair. "I don't get you, Sue. I'll be obliged if you'll fetch in my supper now," he commanded.

"It's out there on the stove, burned to a crisp through your own fault. Go get it yourself," Sue retorted, as she swung about and walked out of the room. Her heavy shoes echoed on the stairs, as she climbed to her own room.

Perry Gartland sat stupidly in his chair, apparently expecting that Sue would change her mind and do his bidding. When she didn't return, he slammed out into the kitchen, grabbed a piece of burned steak out of the frying pan, and gnawed at it as viciously as though he were a starved dog.

The gong sounded the call for breakfast next morning at the usual hour. Sue Gartland, even though she had rebelled at her half-brother's management of Tumbling Rock Ranch, was no quitter. The men had to be fed, and there

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was no one else on the premises who could cook.

Perry didn't enter the dining room until after Spur Wendel and the other two punchers were seated. He was openly surprised when his sister greeted him coolly.

He responded with a surly nod and gulped his food hastily, the first to leave the table. He walked morosely out to the barn and waited for the hands to appear.

Slim Dines and Sammy Ennis were the first to join him.

"Where's Spur?" he gruffly inquired.

"Chinnin' wit' Miss Sue," said Slim Dines with ill-concealed disapproval.

"He is, huh? Well, throw the saddles on the ponies. I'm sendin' you up in the hills this morning," snapped out Perry.

"Want yuhr nag saddled?" inquired Slim.

"No, Spur'll go with you. Here he comes now." He glared at his top hand suspiciously, accosting him curtly.

"Spur, I want you and the boys to scout over the range and drive down a hundred head of my fattest critters. Get started pronto," he commanded.

"Miss Sue's asked me to hook up the buggy team. That won't take me a jiffy——" Spur began.

"Hook up the buggy team!" exploded Perry. "You'll do no such thing."

"But I told her that I would," the top hand remonstrated.

"And I say that you won't. What'd I hire you for, top hand or chore boy? Sue's gettin' too all-fired smart all of a sudden. What's she want the buggy for at this time of the mornin', anyhow?" Perry demanded.

"I didn't ask her," retorted Spur Wendel shortly.

"Oh, you didn't ask her, huh? Well, I'm askin' you to saddle your pony quick, Wendel." Young Gartland glared at his top hand savagely.

Spur Wendel returned the glare silently, expressively, and went on into the barn. Perry paced back and forth, a frown drawing his black brows in a lowering line above his eyes. He gave but a surly glance at Slim and Sammy, when they led their saddled ponies out of the barn door and took them over to the watering trough across the yard. More clattering of hoofs on the plank flooring, and Perry Gartland stood ready to issue directions to his top hand.

"Why, you yaller pup!" he hoarsely bellowed, as Spur Wendel emerged through the doorway leading, not a saddled pony, but the fully-harnessed buggy span. "Take those nags back to their stalls!" he commanded.

"I'm hitchin' them to the buggy for Miss Sue," came the cool, determined reply.

Young Gartland rushed his unruly foreman. The horses snorted and reared, and Spur hastily dropped the halter ropes. The horses bolted and Perry swung a vicious right full at Spur's jaw. He ducked, quickly sidestepping, and confronted his furious employer, although he was strictly on the defensive at first. Perry came for him again and, this time, Spur parried the wild blow and shot out his own right. His fist thudded against Gartland's chin. Perry reeled, but recovered instantly, snatching the six-gun from his holster. Spur closed in on him with a mighty leap and caught him by the wrist, jerking the gun to one side just as Perry pulled the trigger. The report rang out, the bullet zipping through the long hair of Spur's chaps. He threw his left leg behind Perry's heels, gave a heave with his shoulder, and Perry went over backward, Spur on top of him. He wrested the gun out of Perry's hand, caught it by the barrel, and lifted it shoulder high, the butt poised for a downward blow.

"You're fired, Wendel!" Perry Gartland hissed through clenched teeth, his

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eyes rolling as they beheld the menacing gun.

"Not till after I hook up that buggy team," declared Wendel promptly.

"O-oh!" A woman's clear voice sounded from just above them.

Spur Wendel lifted his eyes and looked up into Sue Gartland's ashen face.

"Give me that gun, Spur!" she directed, as she reached down and plucked the six-gun from his fist. "Now get up!" She stood there, slim and deadly calm, while the top hand leaped to his feet and her brother got up more deliberately. She ignored Spur and spoke directly to her brother, "From what I overheard, I take it that you objected to Spur's doing what I asked him to do."

"That hombre's gettin' altogether too fresh to take orders from his betters. He's fired, understand? Go roll your blankets, Wendel," was Perry's reply.

"You're still wantin' the buggy team hooked up, Miss Sue?" Spur turned away from Gartland and spoke to the girl.

She looked from one to the other of the determined men. The gun dangled from her right hand as though she had forgotten that she was holding it.

"He's fired! He's gettin' off this ranch this minute. Don't you dare butt into this affair, Sue!" Perry moved toward his sister, his brazen eyes illuminated with fury.

"It was you who butted into my affair, Perry Gartland. I asked Spur to hitch up the buggy, and I'm asking him again to do it," Sue declared. With a snarl of rage, Gartland dove past Wendel in a frenzied attempt to snatch the six-gun from his sister's hand. The impact of his attack nearly threw her off her feet; but she clung to the pistol desperately, a smothered cry wrung from her lips at the crushing grip of Gartland's fingers around her wrist.

That little scream infuriated Wendel. He sprang for Gartland, his first thought to protect Sue, the second to prevent Perry's getting possession of the gun. Spur closed in, struggling to break Perry's hold on the girl's wrist. The three of them swayed back and forth, fiercely, wordlessly, each impelled with the idea of getting the gun.

There was a muffled report, a groan of anguish. One of the three bodies relaxed and crumpled to the ground. A metallic clank and the six-gun dropped beside the human figure.

Sue Gartland and Spur Wendel stood on either side of the prostrate body, staring in dazed bewilderment into each other's eyes. It was Perry who lay limply at their feet.

Before either of them fully realized what had happened, Slim Dines crowded in on the scene, Sammy Ennis not far behind him.

"Who d-done it?" Slim Dines chattered the question, his eyes glued on the silent figure of his boss.

Sue Gartland was ghastly pale. Her eyes were widened violet pools, reflecting horror and consternation. Spur Wendel looked steadily at Sue Gartland, his own face blanching when he saw the agony so plainly expressed in her eyes. It was but a moment's hesitation on his part before he turned to Slim Dines.

"I shot him," he stated clearly, decisively.

"No, no," a trembling wail came from the girl.

"You heard me, Slim, Sammy," bluntly interrupted Spur. "It was me done the shooting."

A movement of the body distracted Sue's attention from Spur. "Oh, he isn't killed, thank God!" She dropped to her knees beside the twitching form of her half-brother.

"Quick, Sammy, ride for the doctor! Go!" She placed a hand over the unconscious man's heart. "He's alive. Slim, you and Spur help me carry him

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into the house. Carefully," her voice died away in a strangled sob.

"Hey, Sammy!" Slim Dines picked the gun off the ground and hailed the cowboy who was running toward the watering trough, where he had left his pony. "Yuh'd better fetch the sheriff along with the doctor." Dines gave Spur Wendel a sharp glance as the two bent low and lifted Gartland from the ground.

Sue ran ahead and prepared the bed in her brother's room. They removed the wounded man's clothing and put him in the bed without his gaining consciousness. Sue applied various remedies, but something warned her that there was no hope. The bullet had penetrated the left breast dangerously near the heart. Spur was assisting as best he could. Out of the corner of her eye, Sue caught Slim Dines sharply scrutinizing the top hand.

"Spur," she spoke quietly, striving to quell the tremor in her voice, "get me a pitcher of cold water from the kitchen."

Two moments after Spur left the room, a shudder rocked the girl's body. Perry's heart had ceased beating. Sue was in a panic at first, but swiftly marshaled her wits. She motioned to Slim.

"I must have more bandages. Stay with Perry, Slim, I'll be right back." She hurried out into the kitchen where Wendel was filling the pitcher at the cold-water tap.

"Spur, Perry's gone—just this moment!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands in suppressed agitation.

"Dead! That's t-tough." Spur clenched his jaws, fumbled at the water tap, then shut it off.

"Oh, Spur, I hate to say it, but he brought it on himself. Y-you can swear that you shot him in self defense, or that it was an accident."

"Don't you worry about me, Miss Sue," said Spur, bracing up in order to encourage the girl.

"But I can't help it. You heard Slim, telling Sammy to fetch the sheriff. They'll both stand up for Perry. They're good friends of his. You know what that means; they'll testify against you. I'm afraid for you, Spur." Her lips were quivering, deep violet shadows darkened her eyes.

"You don't blame me, Sue. You know that I didn't figure to kill him?" Spur asked.

"I know that you didn't. I'll swear that it was in self defense," Sue told him.

"Then I'm going to light out, long as you believe in me." Spur deposited the pitcher of water in the sink, his chin settling into firm lines.

"No; not that. Folks will believe that you're guilty if you do. Stay and face it, Spur." She was pleading earnestly with him.

"It'd look bad—you taking my part, on the witness stand and everything." He shook his head soberly. "Sue, I can't stay. Slim and Sammy ain't nowise strong for me. They'll do me dirt. I'm going before the sheriff nabs me. It'll save a whole heap of trouble," he told her.

"Oh, this is terrible, terrible. Seems like it's all my fault, too. Perry and I had a row last night; and this never would have happened if I hadn't made up my mind to stand up for my rights. Spur, I wanted you to hitch up the buggy, because I'd planned to go to Toptown and buy myself new and pretty clothes. Don't you see that I'm to blame? I'm more guilty than you are. Promise me that you won't run away, Spur." She came close to him, clutching his sleeve with shaking fingers, her teeth chattering audibly.

"Does Slim know that Perry's dead?" Spur demanded.

She shook her head. "I didn't tell him; I was afraid to, till after I talked to you."

"Here, take this pitcher. Go back

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to the room. Keep Slim in there long as you can. Give me time to figger this out. Quick, go, before Slim finds out that Perry's dead," he directed, as he thrust the pitcher into her hands and gently urged her out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE TOP HAND'S JOB.

REACHING the door of Perry's bedroom, Sue leaned against the casing. Water spilled over the top of the pitcher and splashed upon the floor. She couldn't hold the pitcher steady, but she knew that she must control her nerves before entering that chamber of death.

Perry Gartland had never shown her the least token of brotherly affection or consideration; but he was her half-brother nevertheless; the same man was father to them both. She would try to forget last night's crude insult, his domineering attitude ever since the death of their father. He had been hateful toward her mother, and Sue vividly recalled how patiently her mother had always put up with this cruelly tormenting stepson.

She mustn't hold resentment against the dead. But Spur wasn't to blame. Even so, it would be a terribly trying ordeal for her to testify upon the witness stand to all the sordid details leading up to the fatal quarrel. People would misjudge her, think her heartless; public sympathy would go out to her murdered brother. And Slim and Sammy! Their testimony would carry more weight than hers or Spur's. Spur would be found guilty, then sentenced to be hanged. He was right; it would be fatal for him to stay till the sheriff came. Why hadn't she agreed with his plan, urged him to fly. But it wasn't too late.

Sue started back for the kitchen.

There was a creak of hinges, and Slim Dines opened the bedroom door.

"He's awful still!" he said in a hoarse whisper, denoting fear of being left alone with the dead. "Come in, quick!" He pushed the door wide open and crowded her into the room ahead of him.

It was impossible to steal back and warn Spur, but Sue recalled his final direction, "Keep Slim in there!" Holding the pitcher in one hand, she gripped the puncher by the arm and drew him across the threshold after her.

"I'm afraid, Slim; don't leave me." She was afraid in more ways than one. Perry, dead, seemed to be threatening her with more poignant unhappiness than the living Perry. Spur had always treated her with kindness, and Perry had resented it. And, because Spur had proven his loyalty and respect by fighting for her, he had endangered his own life.

If he stayed and faced trial, they'd surely hang him. If he ran away, he'd be branded a desperate outlaw and hunted by human bloodhounds.

But whatever Spur did, she'd stay by him, even if the whole valley condemned her as a heartless and wicked person.

"He ain't moved!" Slim Dines' awed whisper startled Sue out of her painful reverie. She nearly dropped the pitcher; her fingers dug into the cowboy's sleeve.

She felt Slim's muscles quaking. She loosened her grasp on his arm. Something clicked in her brain, as though a message had been suddenly received, and the gist of it was just a single word repeated over and over, "Courage! Courage!"

She walked straight to the bedside, placed the pitcher on the littered table, standing against the wall, and looked down into the face of her half-brother. She didn't want to feel bitter toward him, so tried to recall a single kindly act of his. She couldn't think of one. Even on his lifeless features there was stamped a taunting, sinister expression.

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Sue stooped over and tenderly pressed the eyelids shut; but that didn't soften the harsh lines.

"Y-yuh reckon he's cashed in?" whispered Slim, hovering near the door.

"Stay with me, please, till the doctor comes," she said, evading his question.

"The doctor won't do no good now," Slim stated, staring at the dead face of his boss. "It's the sheriff's job. Perry was a good scout. Spur'll get strung up for this. Where's he at?" Slim asked, groping for the doorknob.

"Slim, I'm not positive that Spur shot Perry." Sue didn't dare antagonize the cowboy. She must keep him in the room till Spur made his getaway, or till she could slip out and beg him to run for his life. "I had the gun. It belonged to Perry, I'd taken it away from Spur. When Perry jumped for it, Spur tried to keep him from getting it. All three of us had hold of the gun; nobody knows who pulled the trigger."

"Spur said that he shot him. Me and Sammy heard him, so did you. Those two ain't been hittin' it off smooth for a long spell. Spur's been itchin' to get a crack at Perry. Sure he done for him; me and Sammy'll prove it."

"I can't believe it. Why, do you know, Slim, I think that Spur spoke up like he did so's you wouldn't think that I shot my own brother." That idea hadn't occurred to Sue before, and it came as a shock to her now. It might be the truth. And it would be just like Spur. She must get word to him before Slim took it upon himself to shadow him till the sheriff arrived.

"Aw, why'd we think that yuh plugged yuhr brother?" questioned the puncher, eying her covertly.

"You know what started the trouble, don't you?" she asked, sparring for time. Any sort of an argument would serve so long as she could keep Slim in the house.

"'Count of that buggy team, wa'n't it?" Slim demanded.

"Yes, Spur was doing what I asked him. Perry objected."

"Yeah, and Perry was right. There's allus ructions when a woman gets out of her place," was the man's insolent remark.

"My place, what do you think it is?" Sue inquired.

"Why, cookin' and chores, same's yuh've done up to now," replied the puncher candidly, accusingly.

"Didn't you know that I own half interest in Tumbling Rock Ranch?" Sue asked.

"Waal, that wa'n't no call for yuh to horn in and grab the bossin' job outa Perry's hands," she was told.

"Oh!" Sue saw clearly that Slim Dines was on Perry's side. It wouldn't help her present problem openly to resent his poor opinion of her standing on the ranch. But she was indignant, not crushed by his frank statement. She shrank at the part she was playing, keeping Slim from blocking the escape of Perry's self-confessed murderer. But Spur was innocent of a real crime, she firmly believed that. He must have a few more minutes in which to decide what to do.

"Slim, you and Perry were good friends, weren't you?" She glided softly away from the deathbed and approached the cowboy.

"Yeah, he'd promised me Spur's job soon's he fired him offn the ranch. He had a hunch that that hombre was double crossin' him," Slim told her.

"Just how do you mean?" Sue demanded.

"Waal, wasn't Spur snoopin' round the house a lot?"

"But why was that double crossing Perry?" the girl persisted.

"Aw, yuh and Perry never hit it off too good," Slim muttered.

"Mostly because I objected to his drinking and gambling, Slim."

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"I ain't got no use for guys which don't drink and gamble," the man remarked.

Sue didn't answer. She had succeeded in slipping in between Slim and the bedroom door. She stood with her back against it as though unconscious of purposely detaining the cowboy.

"Would you mind staying with Perry?" she faltered. "I'm faint. Soon as I get some fresh air, I'll come back."

"Nothin' can't be done for poor old Perry now, 'ceptin' to corral Spur Wendel. I'll go with yuh." Slim wasn't to be left alone in the same room with the dead. He brusquely reached for the knob and pushed open the door in spite of Sue's standing in his way.

How long had she kept him there? It had seemed ages, but she had been in such a mental upheaval that it might have been a minute or two only.

Slim Dines hurried through the living room, on into the dining room, and out of the house by way of the kitchen. Sue went with him, her heart beating rapidly as she slipped out upon the back porch.

Spur wasn't in sight. She swept the yard, the barn, corrals and vicinity of the bunk house. A side glance at Slim! He, too, was scanning the grounds, the fingers of his right hand curving around the holster of his six-gun.

"Look, Slim, there's the buggy team down the lane. Put them in the barn before they get snagged up in the harness." If Spur had but a half hour's start he could lose himself in the timbered hills to the west of the ranch.

"Seems like Spur oughta do that, bein' as how it was him which harnessed 'em and started this here shootin'," Slim expostulated.

"Yes, but I told him to do it, Slim." Sue still refused to show resentment at the puncher's unruly attitude. She must keep her head in this emergency.

He strode off the porch and, instead of hopping on his pony and going after the buggy team, he marched over to the bunk house. Sue didn't hesitate, but ran along beside him, stopping only when she came to the door of the men's quarters. Slim had gone inside and was hastily examining Spur's bunk.

"He's beat it!" He snapped out the words harshly. "I'm gonna get him, Miss Sue." He went to his own corner and took his rifle off the deer horns forming a rack on the wall. "He's sneaked out and got a runnin' start, but there's a fat chance I can overhaul him with this." He patted the rifle, picked up a box of cartridges and filled the magazine, stuffing extra ones into his pocket, as he crossed the floor toward the door.

Sue took up her stand on the sill. "That's the sheriff's business, not yours," she said, with a sudden break in her voice. And she added pleadingly, "Please, Slim, don't leave me alone. Wait till Sammy returns."

"Yuh're wantin' that ornery killer to make his get-away," Slim remarked.

"You have no right——" Sue began.

"No right? Wasn't Perry my boss, my friend? And Spur Wendel allows he done for him. Perry'd oughta canned Spur months back. He said that he was goin' to and give me his job. No tellin' when the sheriff'll get here. Let me outa here, Miss Sue." He made a move to pass her, but stepped back when he saw the blue eyes suddenly flash forth strange violet lights.

"O-ho!" It was a low ejaculation. "I get yuh, Miss Sue," he said, with a knowing droop to his left eyelid. "There's a reason yuh ain't keen for Spur to get ketched, huh?" He deliberately lowered the butt of the rifle to the floor and leaned slightly forward on the barrel. "Waal, s'posin' I do what yuh says? What's there in it for me?" he demanded.

"What do you mean?" A slow, angry flush crept from her neck to her

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brow as she met his cunning, questioning look.

"Perry allowed I was to be top hand here, soon's he got rid of Spur. I could let on I didn't hear what Spur said, about him doin' the killin'. And s'posin' I don't trail him, does Perry's promise hold good?" Slim asked.

"Oh, so that's the kind of a man you are, Slim Dines? I'd begun to have some respect for you, because you were standing by Perry so loyally. And now, when you see a chance to gain your own selfish ends, you'd turn traitor. I couldn't trust such a person, ever." She didn't try to conceal the scorn she felt for him.

"Yuh mean I don't get the top hand's job?" Slim inquired.

"Exactly," Sue snapped.

"Is that so? Waal"—he glared at her maliciously—"mebbe yuh think me and Sammy was blind. We wa'n't, we seen that row from start to finish. It wasn't Spur which was holdin' that gun when it went off. Yuh want me to go up and tell the sheriff who killed Perry Gartland?" He leaned over the rifle barrel, a leering, bullying figure.

Sue cringed away from him, for the moment losing her grip on her nerves. The puncher was quick to follow up his thinly-veiled threat.

"Now, what about that top hand's job? Do I land it?"

CHAPTER IV.

ENTER THE SHERIFF.

YOU do not!" Sue Gartland emphatically gave him the answer. "And what's more, there's no job on this ranch for a man like you."

"Yuh mean I'm fired?" Slim asked.

"Just that," Sue told him.

"I git yuh," Slim sneeringly retorted. "Yuh ain't wantin' none of Perry's friends stickin' round here, not after what happened."

"Perry's friends? You haven't the nerve to call yourself his friend after that cowardly offer, have you? Oh, but I shan't waste words on you, Slim Dines. Roll your blankets and get off this ranch," she ordered. Then she swung away from the doorstep and got as far as the bottom step of the bunkhouse porch before Slim Dines snarled his parting threat.

"All right, Miss Smarty. Yuh won't be bossin' this here outfit after I spill to the sheriff what I seen with my own eyes. And yuh got me wrong; I was jest tryin' yuh out on that top-hand job. They's gonna be two empty jobs on the Tumblin' Rock purty pronto, boss and top hand's, er I miss my guess."

Sue Gartland didn't linger to bandy words with the irate and disappointed puncher. She hadn't forgotten, for a single moment, her purpose in detaining him. If Spur Wendel had succeeded in riding into the timbered hills, her mission had been fulfilled. Also, she had satisfied her former suspicions as to Slim Dines' real character. There was a yellow streak clear through him, and he had been Perry's closest pal. It wasn't a pleasant thought.

She dreaded entering the house. Instead, she found work to do to keep her from dwelling on the dread business ahead of her. She went into the barn and saddled her own mare. She rode down the lane and drove the harnessed buggy horses back into their stalls.

It was too soon to expect the return of Sammy Ennis with the doctor and sheriff.

The mooing of cows brought her mind back to routine chores. She took a pail off the rack on the kitchen porch and went out to the small corral adjoining the hill pasture. It didn't take her many minutes to milk the two cows. She carefully set the brimming bucket outside the fence, crossed through the corral, and let down the bars. She leaned her forearms on the top rail, re-

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maining there for some time after the cows had ambled out into the green pasture.

Her brain persisted in throbbing with the tragic events of the morning. Her gaze wandered across the short, sweet grasses of the pasture, onto the foothills edging the far side of the cleared acres. A flock of blackbirds wheeled overhead, piping noisily as they darted on whistling wings for the tulles growing in the overflow of Tumbling Rock Creek. And high up on that jagged peak in the sheltering range of hills, Sue's eyes rested upon Tumbling Rock itself.

From her earliest childhood that strangely-balanced rock had inspired the girl with awe. To her, it had become a faithful, silent guardian. She had made many pilgrimages to it, knew every inch of that narrow trail twisting and winding up the timbered cañon, down which Tumbling Rock Creek sang and babbled, the source of the ranch's splendid water supply.

Tumbling Rock! Well she remembered how she had been thrilled through and through, when she had first heard the old legend connected with that misshapen, teetering boulder.

Sue shivered, and her fingers dug spasmodically into the cedar rail of the fence. There had been a big fight; her brother lay dead in the house; Spur Wendel was riding for his life up that dim cattle trail which twisted around the base of Tumbling Rock.

Tears blinded the girl's eyes. Through the mist, Tumbling Rock seemed to totter and sway. She threw out her arms, stretching them toward that great boulder which had stood sentinel over her destiny since the hour of her birth.

She crossed her arms on the fence rail and bowed her head on them, her shoulders shaking with grief and worry. She felt so alone, so beset with terrors, real and imaginary. She loved every acre of Tumbling Rock Ranch. It had been dearly bought by self-sacrifice and grinding toil on the part of her parents. Now she was sole mistress of the cattle ranch, and unhappiness had her in its grip. Spur was fleeing into the hills, an outlaw; her half-brother was dead; Sammy Ennis had gone for the sheriff; Slim Dines was threatening to brand her as Spur's partner in the awful killing.

"Spur's not guilty. And I'm not. I've got to be brave. I'll fight for us both. I shan't be a coward," she reflected. A sound drifted to her ears. She lifted her head from her crossed arms and looked over her shoulder.

The drumming of hoofbeats rose and fell. Horsemen were galloping up the lane. She couldn't see them because the house obstructed her view. Was it possible that Sammy Ennis had ridden clear into Toptown and back? But the town was only nine miles from the ranch; the round trip could be accomplished in less than two hours. She had gone through more mental anguish since Sammy had raced down the lane than she had suffered all the rest of her nineteen years.

She drew her arms from the top rail, curbing the frenzied impulse to rush out and hail the sheriff before Slim Dines blurted forth his spiteful accusations. She must keep her head, even though icy fingers seemed to be clutching at her heart. A feeling of utter loneliness depressed her. She had been a miserable little drudge for so many years that she hadn't had a chance to mingle with the valley folks. There wasn't a person she could call her true friend, except Spur Wendel. He'd always been kind and thoughtful, and how wretchedly he was being rewarded for his friendliness and loyalty.

Sue opened the corral gate, closed it mechanically, and picked up the pail of milk. The foam had settled, dwindling to a thin scum of tiny white bubbles.

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"Courage! Courage!" Again that message from some unknown source clicked in her brain.

Sue Gartland straightened her shoulders, the heavy milk pail was carried as though it were a featherweight. Flecks of violet darkened the blue of her eyes. She marched on to the house with the dauntless air of a queen.

When she was within twenty yards of the kitchen porch, she heard the clatter of hoofs growing louder, and the next instant the mounted ponies were pounding around the corner of the house.

Sue stopped, the brimming bucket held so firmly that not even a drop of milk spilled over the side. Slim Dines and another man headed the small group of horsemen. The puncher had ridden down the lane in order to "spill" his version of the killing to the sheriff.

The horses were pulled to a halt so close to Sue that gravel was spattered against her skirt by the sliding, grinding hoofs.

"Thar she is, sheriff!" Slim Dines pointed an accusing finger at the girl. "Yuh don't have to go no farther to nab Perry Gartland's murderer."

The violet lights in Sue's eyes burned steadily as she looked squarely at the sheriff. She waited for him to speak, ignoring the vindictive puncher.

"You heard him, Miss Gartland?" Sheriff Clay threw a leg over the horn of his saddle and clumped to the ground. "What you got to say for yourself?" He made three strides toward her, then stopped as though confronting a gun instead of the challenging expression in Sue Gartland's flashing eyes.

CHAPTER V.

"GET SPUR WENDEL!"

THE sheriff was the first to shift his gaze. He closed and opened his fists uneasily, fumbled at the holster of his gun, and quickly dropped his right hand to his side. He flushed. It was disconcerting, waiting for the girl to answer his blunt question. He had known the girl only as a shy, drab little thing, far different from the courageous, handsome woman who stood before him now.

Strange that he had never noticed her remarkable eyes, the splendid poise of her head. And nerve—he became fascinated in observing how steadily she held that full bucket of milk. Her sleeves were rolled to her elbows, and the arms were firmly molded, tanned a warm, golden brown. The faded gingham dress was loose at the neck, displaying the creamy texture of throat and bosom. But it was her eyes which puzzled the sheriff, and checked him from accosting her as a suspected murderess.

The girl made the next move. She proceeded to the porch, a splendid grace in each step. She placed the bucket on a bench as though officiating at a simple but dignified little ceremony. Not until she had covered the top of the pail with a clean cloth, did she in any way acknowledge the presence of the dumfounded group of men.

Then she approached them and singled out the gray-mustached person sitting, quite stiff and astounded, in his saddle.

"Doctor Macey, you've come too late; but I'll take you in to my brother." She spoke slowly and with no visible signs of emotion which racked her body and soul.

Doctor Macey dismounted, clinging to the black surgical case hung by a strap over his shoulder. When he had brushed past the sheriff, Sue Gartland turned and led the way through the kitchen door.

Sammy Ennis leaned from his saddle and nudged Slim Dines. "A cool one! And did yuh pipe the glassy stare she handed the sheriff?" The cowboy spoke in a strident whisper.

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"It's all bluff!" retorted Slim Dines, himself puzzled at her manner.

"But I never seen her act up like that before," declared the mystified Sammy. "She's allus shied off and bolted, same's a range pony in a strange corral. Now she's tossin' her head sassy as an outlaw."

Sheriff Clay, who had been staring at the door through which the girl and the doctor had disappeared, swung around and scrutinized the two cowboys.

"You'll swear that you saw her pull a gun on her brother, Slim?" He spoke gruffly, pointedly.

"I seen the gun in her hand when Perry jumped for her," avowed Slim. "Me and Sammy were standin' right thar," he indicated the watering trough and then motioned toward the barn. "And they was fightin' over next the barn door, wa'n't they, Sammy?"

"Yep; she grabbed the gun offn Spur Wendel when he was layin' to bust open Perry's head. Spur and Perry got up, and there was more jawin'. Then Perry swooped fer the gun, Spur after him. Looked like it was her done the shootin', bein' as how she had the gun. Only Spur up and allows he croaked Perry when we closed in on 'em. Don't know why he allowed that, myself," Sammy remarked, not being the sort who would sacrifice his own life for the sake of a girl.

"What'd you say started the fight?" inquired the sheriff.

"Her hornin' in and tryin' to run the ranch," snapped Slim.

"From what I've just seen of her, I'd say that she could do it better than her brother," commented the sheriff evenly. "Don't you boys ramble off. We've got to round up Spur Wendel right after I have a parley with the girl." Sheriff Clay entered the ranch house, leaving the two cowboys whispering in low, earnest tones.

Connecting doors were open in the house, so the sheriff walked authoritatively through the rooms and into the death chamber. Doctor Macey had finished his examination and stood at the foot of the bed beside Sue Gartland. When the sheriff came in, they both turned and faced him.

A swift, searching glance at the body and the sheriff addressed the physician. "What'd you find, doc?" he asked.

"A bullet through his heart. He's been dead two hours at least."

"Miss Gartland, who shot your brother?" Sheriff Clay put the question baldly.

"I don't know," Sue told him.

"You don't know? You was right there when the shootin' happened, wasn't you?" the sheriff inquired.

"I was," the girl answered.

"Didn't you have the gun in your possession?"

"I did."

"How come then you don't know who fired the fatal shot?" the sheriff pursued.

"There were three of us fighting for the gun," Sue remarked.

"Yourself, Spur Wendel and your brother?"

"Yes."

"Did you do the shooting, Miss Gartland?" the sheriff asked.

"I don't know."

"Did Spur Wendel?"

"I can't swear to that," came Sue's usual noncommittal reply.

"Ain't it true Spur Wendel said he shot your brother?"

"Yes, but I don't believe he knows whether he did or not."

"Why'd he say he done it, then?"

"Because he's the kind of a man who'd protect a woman with his life." Sue Gartland's eyes kindled with deep violet lights, as she replied.

"Um, why'd Spur need to protect you? Did you and your brother have a fight?"

A wave of crimson stained Sue

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Gartland's face. She couldn't and wouldn't relate the details of that shameful scene over the soiled and highly-scented red-silk dress. Involuntarily, she cringed away from the bed and moved toward the door. She didn't want to harbor such bitterness against her half-brother. She'd forget that scene, never breathe it to a soul, never mention Perry's gambling debts, nor how he wanted her to settle them.

"Yes, we had a row." There was a faint catch in her voice. "He objected to Spur's hitching up the buggy team, after I'd asked him to do it."

"Supposin' you tell me all what happened?" The sheriff had been quick to detect her flush.

Sue gave a truthful account of the dispute and resultant tragedy over the hitching up of the buggy animals. When she had finished, Sheriff Clay delivered his ultimatum.

"They's just one thing to do, and that's to get Spur Wendel. Which way'd he head for, Miss Gartland?" he asked.

"I didn't see him leave the ranch. He isn't guilty, sheriff." She wished with all her heart, now, that she had persuaded Spur not to leave.

"Huh, don't look like it, does it? Him beatin' it for cover and leaving you here to face the music. Doc"—the sheriff was sarcastic and decisive—"you notify the coroner pronto. I'm going to get Spur Wendel."

Sue didn't attempt to delay the sheriff. She knew that the law must take its course; but she was hoping and praying that Spur would evade capture. The more she thought about his going, the more convinced she became that he had done it to clear her of all suspicion. If she hadn't been mixed up in that fatal struggle for the gun, Spur would have remained and stood trial. He was brave and fine; she'd play her part with equal courage in order to be worthy of his splendid action.

She watched the sheriff ride off across the pasture with Slim Dines and Sammy Ennis. Had they picked up Spur's trail already? She stifled the impulse to scream aloud, ran out to the milking corral, and climbed to the middle rail of the fence. She clung there rigidly till the sheriff and his posse of two were swallowed from sight in the trees fringing the western boundary of the pasture. She dropped from the fence as she heard the faint drumming of hoofs. Hurrying to the corner of the house, she saw Doctor Macey cantering down the lane. He was bound for Toptown and the coroner. Sue was left alone on Tumbling Rock Ranch. Worse than alone, for lying there in the house was her half-brother, stark, grim and cruelly accusing.

CHAPTER VI.

SPUR'S COW PONY.

IT was late afternoon of the day of Perry Gartland's funeral. Sue had returned from the graveyard, depressed and heartsick. She had felt terribly alone ever since that tragic quarrel. The days and nights had been worse than nightmares, since she was bitterly conscious of the reality of all that had happened. The inquest had been a miserable ordeal, with the jury bringing in a verdict of guilty against Spur Wendel. And that, in spite of Sue's agreeing with the testimony of Slim Dines to the extent that she, herself, might have fired the fatal shot in the struggle for the gun.

But if that were the jury's verdict, others chose to believe Slim Dines' account of the shooting. Sue was avoided, especially by the womenfolk of the valley.

And now, alone on Tumbling Rock Ranch, Sue Gartland was striving to get hold of herself, to summon to her aid that elusive little message of courage which had clicked in her brain once

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before. She had to face life bravely and alone, it seemed. For her only friend, Spur Wendel, was hiding out there in the hills somewhere, an outlaw, with a price on his head, and vigilant posses hunting for him.

She couldn't breathe within the walls of the house. The new, black dress, a mocking symbol of mourning, stifled her. She ran up the stairs to her room and stripped off the smothering garment, throwing it far back in the closet. She made a hasty inspection of her wardrobe, which was pitifully limited. She took from its hook the faded, brown gingham; and, as she slipped it over her head, she winced, thinking of that stained and heavily scented red-silk gown which had precipitated all the trouble.

It had been the final cause of her rebellion. She had resented Perry's insult; had determined to hire a cook, buy decent clothes and have as good a time as Belle and Jennie Ramage.

Her mind was in a brooding turmoil. She wondered if this were her punishment for wanting to enjoy life as other girls did. What happiness could she ever find in pretty clothes after this? She'd brought down upon her own shoulders a gigantic load of responsibilities and suspicions. She doubted her ability to meet them, trembled when she thought of facing the ranchers and their womenfolk. She shook her head sadly, groped out of the room and down the stairs, eager to feel the cooling breeze blowing full in her face.

Sue walked out to the corral fence, leaning against the rough-hewn cedar rails. Already Tumbling Rock was sending forth its purple tongue of shadow. Sue watched the slowly creeping blot darken the green meadow-grass, stealing slowly forward to her very feet.

The deep liquid notes of red-winged blackbirds floated up from the tulles growing in the overflow of the creek. Killdeers, almost invisible in their dartings hither and yon in the pasture, uttered plaintive, eventide croonings. Always she'd loved that hour on the ranch, but she shivered now. The song of the birds stirred up poignant memories, the breeze carried with it the chill of the September evening. Her eyes wandered across the pasture and rested briefly on the clumps of willows and quaking aspen bordering the creek. The branches were swaying in the wind, the leaves glimmering with the golden tints of autumn.

And on the far side of the pasture fence, cattle were ambling, single file, down a trail winding through the tall trunks of the pines. Feed was getting scarce on the mountain range, the cattle must be herded down to the ranch. It was time for the fall round-up, and there wasn't a cowboy on the ranch. Sammy Ennis had quit out of sympathy for Slim Dines. And the pair of them were heading posses in the hunt for Spur Wendel.

Sue lifted her eyes to the misshapen bulk of Tumbling Rock. Its shadow was enveloping her; the great rock still guarded the valley.

A scattering of the cattle up in the timber diverted her attention. She peered through the luminous afterglow trying to discover what had frightened the panicky range critters. At first, she could make out nothing but the blurred figures of cows and calves. She climbed up the rails of the fence and shaded her eyes with her right hand.

"That's a pony!" She spoke aloud, her left hand fluttering to her throat to still the suffocating throbbing.

The horse trotted down the hillside trail, coming into plainer view. It cut through the thinning ranks of tree trunks and made straight for the path skirting the outer line of fence. Sue now saw that the horse was saddled and bridled, but riderless. A moment

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later, she saw that it was a short-coupled bay!

"It's Bo! Spur's pony!" She reeled, then frantically snatched for the top rail to save herself from falling. Recovering quickly, she jumped to the ground and ran toward the barn.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Something's happened to Spur!" She flew into the barn and tossed the bridle on her own mare. She didn't stop to put on a saddle, but led the spirited animal out of the door and leaped upon its bare back.

Sue rode with the grace and ease of an expert, having learned to do it almost as soon as she could toddle. She opened the corral gates without dismounting, then skimmed across the pasture swiftly as a coursing greyhound. She reached the far fence line just as the riderless pony thrust its head over the bars and nickered a greeting.

"Bo! Bo!" Sue was off her own mare and jerking at the bars with shaking hands. "Where's Spur, Bo?" She stroked the pony's nose, patted the arched neck, then examined the saddle and bridle.

"Reins looped over the horn. You didn't throw him, did you, Bo?" Talking half to herself, half to the pony, Sue led Bo through the lowered bars. "Where's your master? Oh, have they caught him, shot him?" She tried to calm her panicky fears. She noticed that the pony showed no signs of a hard chase. There were no white rims of perspiration on the smooth hide, and those reins looped over the horn! Spur's blanket roll tied neatly behind the saddle, his rifle safely stowed in the worn, leather scabbard!

The girl sent searching glances up along the fence path, scanned the trails disappearing into the pines. She almost expected to see Spur hurrying down to overtake his prized pony. She wanted to hunt for him, but was afraid that she might run into one of the posses. The range cattle had straggled out from the timber again and stopped when they saw her, their curiosity aroused.

Sue's first spasm of fear passed. Surely, if the sheriff's posse had captured Spur, it would have caught his pony, also. She could arrive at no satisfying conclusions regarding this return of Spur's pony to the ranch. Was it because he could better evade the man hunters on foot? That seemed the more plausible answer; Spur had purposely turned Bo loose, knowing that the sagacious pony would head directly for the ranch. Spur was safe, then. Again the girl experienced that comforting sensation that the cowboy was hiding somewhere within the shadows of Tumbling Rock.

She tightened the cinch, placed a foot in the stirrup, and settled into Spur's saddle. She rode Bo back across the pasture, leading her own mare by its bridle reins. She was anxious to go through his blanket roll, for he might have sent her a message, assuring her that he was safe; that all would come out for the best.

Bo stopped at the corral fence, and Sue lifted the wooden latch free of the slot, the animals sidling through the partially opened gate on nimble hoofs.

She gave the gate a push, and it slammed shut with a bang as she reined Bo for the barn. Halfway to the open door, Sue pulled up with a spasmodic jerk. The beat of hoofs dinned in her ears. She leaned forward in the saddle, straining her eyes to penetrate the gathering twilight. A horseman was galloping up the lane, was already passing the corner of the house.

One of the man hunters! A member of the sheriff's posse hot on Spur Wendel's trail! He'd recognize Spur's pony! Before she had time to think what to do, the horseman had seen her, was bearing down upon her at a stiff trot.

"Seth Varney!" Sue's alarm took a

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different trend. Varney hadn't been sworn in by Sheriff Clay to scour the hills for Spur, of that she was certain. But, flitting through her mind, came her half-brother's sordid revelations about his gambling debts, the money that he owed to this tight-fisted, evil-minded old wretch.

"Howdy, Miss Gartland!" the man greeted her.

Seth Varney halted within a horse's length of her and began stroking his dyed beard with thin, curving fingers.

"Good evening," Sue returned his greeting coldly, thinking fast, hoping against hope that Seth Varney wouldn't recognize Bo. But his business didn't concern the fugitive top hand. It was about the money that Perry owed him, of course. Why did he sit there, clawing at his ugly old beard and squinting his narrow eyes at her for all the world like a greedy old buzzard?

Suddenly he ceased stroking his whiskers, craned his neck forward and clucked to his horse, moving to a position where he obtained a broadside view of Bo.

"So!" he gave a throaty croak. "They've ketched young Wendel, huh?"

"Have they?" Sue couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Have they?" he repeated, wagging his head and looking knowingly into the girl's startled eyes. "What I've heard tell's true, hey, about yuh bein' in cahoots with this Spur Wendel?"

"What do you mean?" Sue asked.

"Yuh heard me, and I'm seein' with my own eyes, ain't I, what's what. Yuh've got that killer hid right here on this ranch, ain't yuh?"

"I have not!" Sue suddenly clenched her lower lip under her teeth. She had almost blurted out the real facts about finding Bo. She wouldn't, though. Let him think what was natural for his evil old mind.

"How come yuh to be settin' on his pony, then?" Seth pursued.

"That's none of your business, Seth Varney," she retorted crisply.

"It ain't, hey? Waal, mebbe not," he chuckled insinuatingly. "Depends whether er not yuh're goin' to be jest as mighty over the business which did fetch me over here, Miss Gartland."

Sue knew what was coming. Perry's horrid gambling debts. The old skinflint couldn't wait a decent length of time before trying to collect those illicit gains. Perry had warned her what Varney planned to do; put a lien on Tumbling Rock Ranch. Well, just let him try doing it!

CHAPTER VII.

VARNEY'S THREAT.

I'VE never had any business dealing with you in the past. And what's more, I don't expect to do business with you now or in the future, Mr. Varney," Sue said, giving him no inkling of having guessed his errand.

"Now look here, Miss Gartland, I ain't purposin' to row with yuh. That ain't my way o' doin' business. But yuhr brother; shucks now, ain't he told yuh that he was owin' me a considerable amount?" Seth demanded.

"If he owed you money, that was his personal affair. It had nothing to do with the ranch, for all ranch business had to go through my hands as well as his," the girl told him. "I'm sorry, Mr. Varney, if you are the loser through any private deal with Perry." She didn't budge out of the saddle. Somehow she felt more secure seated in Spur Wendel's saddle.

"Private deal, nothin'. It was money he got offn me to run this here Tumblin' Rock shebang. I got his I O Us right here in my pocket. They's sumthin' over five thousand dollars due me, and I'm goin' to git it, understand?" The clawlike fingers twisted at his scraggly beard.

"That not true. I know exactly how

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much money we've used to run this ranch. We didn't have to borrow a dollar from any one, Mr. Varney," said Sue, firm in her conviction that she was strictly in the right.

"Yuh git off that nag and come into whar they's a light. I'll show yuh them I O Us, all proper signed by yuhr brother's name. It's money what's owin' to me fair and square," Seth Varney said, his voice twanging.

"I shan't look at them. They don't concern me nor Tumbling Rock Ranch. But, if they do, and I'm positive that they don't, take them to my lawyer, Mr. Landers. You know where to find him in Toptown, Mr. Varney," Sue replied decisively, then swerved Bo's head so that her back was turned upon Seth Varney. A little wave of fear chilled her and caused her to hesitate in dismounting. She was alone on the ranch with this crafty, penurious old vulture. It wasn't so much physical fear as a shrinking from something unwholesome that she felt.

Her hesitation was short lived. She swung out of the saddle and started to lead the horses into the barn. A glance over her shoulder revealed Varney in the act of dismounting. Indignation drove out the waves of fear, the violet lights gleamed from the blue of her eyes. The girl quickly put the horses into their stalls, took off the bridles, slipped on the halters, and then removed the saddle from Spur's pony. She carried it into the granary where she tossed it on the floor. Stooping, she slipped the rifle from the leather scabbard and, balancing the barrel across the crook of her left arm, marched out into the yard.

Seth Varney stood beside his horse, still stroking his dyed beard. Sue's eyes had become accustomed to the blurring dusk, and she saw Varney's stooped shoulders hunch forward, the blinking of his narrow eyes when he noticed the rifle that she was carrying.

"Heh-heh!" he gave a dry cackle and stopped fingering his beard to rub his hands together. "Luggin' the killer's gun, hey? But"—here a lifting of his upper lip—"there's some which allows that young Wendel ain't guilty of killin' yuhr brother, Miss Gartland."

"And I happen to be one of them," declared Sue abruptly. "Didn't I make it plain that I want you to get off this ranch? If not, I'm asking you to go at once!" She faced him, drawing the rifle butt snugly up into her right arm pit, the muzzle slanting downward, but in Varney's direction.

"What if I tell the sheriff that I seen yuh fetchin' in Wendel's nag? That yuh jest came from meetin' yuhr brother's killer up thar in the woods?" the man demanded.

"Tell him what you please, but get off my ranch, Varney!" she cried, advancing nearer, a slow fury at the leering old man burning in her veins.

"Yuh've got him hid here, that's why yuh're itchin' fer me to git. Yuh fired them punchers fer the same reason, so's yuh and him could have the ranch to yuhrselves. Don't think yuhr skirts are cleared yet, young woman. Thar's a heap o' talk o' sickin' the grand jury after yuh. Once I tell the sheriff what I seen to-night, yuh'll be slung inter jail quick as scat," Seth announced with a sly grin.

"Then jump on your horse and fly to the sheriff with your vile story, Varney. I'm not holding you back. Go!" She raised the rifle, her eyes blazing as they traveled along the barrel.

Seth Varney huddled behind the shoulder of his horse, a clawlike hand clutching at the horn of the saddle. "Now, look here, Miss Gartland, don't yuh git all stirred up so fast. All I'm askin' is fer yuh to put yuhr O. K. on yuhr brother's I O Us, and I'll keep mum on what I've seen to-night. Ain't that fair enough—me only wantin' what's owin' to me?" he whined in

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avaricious terror of losing his illegal claim against the girl's half-brother.

"It's rotten bribery, that's what it is!" she threw back at him sharply. "Varney, I'm giving you till I count three to get into your saddle and go. One!" she uttered the numeral crisply, warningly.

"Two!" At the second word she trained the sight of the rifle on the shaking, horrified old miser's heart.

With unexpected nimbleness, Varney clambered into his saddle and cruelly yanked at the reins, whereupon his horse spun around, springing away from the barn in rapid jumps. At the near corner of the house, Varney turned his head and his voice rose, cracked and shrill, in a parting threat, "Yuh'll pay fer this, with double interest fer runnin' me off with a gun! I'll git yuh yet, yuh fightin' female fool!"

The echo of galloping hoofs died away in muffled tattooings. A coyote howled from the distant timber line, the yappings vibrating eerily on the night air. Cicadas droned their mournful chorus in farewell to the waning summer. A calf, lost from its mother, bawled pitifully. These dismal sounds thrummed in Sue Gartland's ears as she stood in the gloomy shadow of the barn, the rifle still pressed fiercely against her shoulder.

Seth Varney's cowardly threat dinned loudest of all, and it was like him; but he had been no worse than Slim Dines. Each of them trying to bully her into meeting his own selfish terms. Little they cared who was the real murderer so long as they got what they wanted! And what of Perry, her half-brother? He'd tried to bribe her with a soiled, silken dress.

Sue's arms rocked, the gun slipped from her shoulder and clumped to the ground. The thought of Varney racing off in the night to announce his vile suspicions to the sheriff enraged her afresh. She picked up the rifle and tossed it upon her shoulder, marching to the house with militant strides.

The blue steel of the gun barrel reflected the glimmer of a star. It drew the girl's far-focused gaze from Tumbling Rock to the weapon.

It was Spur Wendel's rifle. Already it had served her well in driving Seth Varney off the ranch. She let the gun drop into the curve of her left arm.

"Yes, I'll fight for my rights, and with this, if they drive me to it." She breathed the words half fiercely, half tenderly, as she snuggled the rifle close to her heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEPUTY'S STAR.

THE tinkling of a cowbell, floating through the open window, aroused Sue Gartland. She lay quietly for a few moments, lulled by the musical notes of the bell and the lowing of cattle. Sunlight streamed into the room, and the eastern sky glowed with the rosy hues of a new morning. Sue closed her eyes, a strange sense of peace and security stealing over her, when the throaty chorus of red-winged blackbirds chimed in with the clinking cowbell.

It was the first time in days that she hadn't been harassed and tensely miserable. She opened her eyes slowly, and the brief period of relaxation passed. The horrid scene with Seth Varney recurred to her, his parting threat sounded in her ears; her eyes fell upon the blue steel of Spur Wendel's rifle leaning against a chair close to the head of her bed.

She sat up, puzzled afresh by the homecoming of the top hand's pony.

"Oh, why did Varney show up when he did? What's happened to Spur? What can I do to help him?" The girl arose and padded softly to the window, which overlooked the barn, corrals and bunk house.

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A louder jangling of the cowbell swerved her attention to the small milking corral. The two dairy animals were grazing in the pasture just without the bars. The bawling of steers carried across the fields, the same critters which had strayed down through the forest aisles the evening before. All the cattle should be rounded up, fattened on the hayfield stubble in readiness for the buyers who'd be making their rounds in another month. There were a thousand duties to attend to, work for half a dozen punchers, and here she was, alone, on Tumbling Rock Ranch.

Sue dressed and went down the stairs. All the rooms were in sad disorder. The ranch had gone to pot since the tragic quarrel. She kindled a fire in the kitchen stove, put a pot of coffee on to boil, and stepped out upon the back porch, intending to milk the dairy cows while the coffee cooked.

"Why, why!" Her hands flew to her throat when she discovered a bucket of milk on the bench under the kitchen window. She stared at it aghast. Spur Wendel's work! He had done this same thing for her in the past, slipping out of the bunk house before the other cowboys were awake, easing her weary routine by milking the cows. But this was different and dangerous.

Sue looked eagerly about, her heart throbbing excitedly. She ran across the yardway and into the barn. The horses were munching contentedly out of freshly filled feed racks.

"Spur!" Sue called softly, but the great barn acted as a sounding box, the name echoing among the high rafters of the loft.

There was no other answer than the echoes, though.

"Bo!" Sue stole into the stall where his pony was tied. "Where's your master, Bo?" A friendly nicker and the pony resumed its munching.

Sue hurried out of the barn, glided along the corral fence in the direction of the bunk house. She paused at the angle of the fence, the bunk house a hundred yards beyond. The thudding of hoofs threw her into a panic; horsemen were cantering up the lane, three of them. At the rate they were riding, they'd be at the house inside of five minutes.

She didn't believe that they had seen her yet, so, watching them out of the corner of her eye, the girl walked away from the corral and, without appearing to hurry, glided to the bunk house.

The man leading the trio spied her. She heard a muffled shout, the quickening of hoofbeats as she slipped from sight around the corner of the house. Sue leaped upon the low porch and dashed into the doorway.

"Spur!" she cried, while her eyes swept the interior. Then she gave a sigh of relief, for Spur wasn't there. To make sure of it, though, Sue rushed from bunk to bunk and, satisfied that no one could be concealed in the room, she retraced her steps to the barn just as the trio of horsemen clattered past the ranch house.

They rode straight for her, Slim Dines in the lead. He halted his pony when it was so close to her that she felt the warm breath whistling through distended nostrils. The puncher leaned forward in his saddle, an insolent twist to his lips as he stared at the girl who had fired him off the ranch.

"Sammy," he directed, jerking his head sideways, "ride over and search that thar bunk house. Varney, take a look-see in the barn." The puncher issued these directions in a grating, domineering manner, his eyes fixed on Sue the while he did so.

When the two men rode off toward their respective goals, Slim Dines leaned farther forward in his saddle, the leer spreading over his face. "Varney tells me that he seen yuh ridin'

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in from the timber on Spur's pony. What yuh got to say for yuhrself, Miss Sue?" he asked.

"Just this—get off my ranch!" Sue commanded. A deadly fury caused her temples to throb. The color left her face. She kept repeating to herself the one word of that clicking message, "Courage! Courage!" Her eyes didn't waver as she looked up into the gloating face of Slim Dines.

"There's a heap of difference in firin' hired hands and orderin' off a deputy sheriff, miss!" Slim Dines smiled malignantly at the girl.

"Where's the deputy sheriff?" Sue demanded.

"Settin' right here on this pony," was the answer.

"I don't believe you!" the girl told him.

Dines deliberately pushed back the flap of his coat, revealing a shining metal star.

"You, a deputy!" The girl's heart felt like a cold stone in her breast.

"Don't tickle yuh much, eh?" The grin widened significantly. "And yuh won't like it none when I tell yuh that Sheriff Clay gave me orders to camp right here on Tumblin' Rock till I round up Spur Wendel."

Sue Gartland checked the scornful words which raced to her tongue. That official emblem had to be respected, even though the man who wore it was a cowardly traitor. Here was a situation which had to be handled carefully, skillfully. Supposing they did find Spur concealed on the premises? And that, after Seth Varney had seen her riding his pony?

"Yuh know whar Spur's hidin', don't yuh?" Dines' question caused a chill to travel up and down her spine.

"I do not," she replied truthfully, but volunteered no information about the mysterious milking of the cows, the feeding of the horses in the barn.

"Hey!" The grating voice of Seth Varney cut through the air. "His pony's tied up in the barn, saddle and blankets're in the granary. The killer ain't fur off."

"Looks purty rotten fer yuh, Miss Sue," Dines said, leering at her hatefully.

Sammy Ennis loped over from the bunk house and Sue realized that she was surrounded by three totally unscrupulous men. Useless to expect the least token of consideration from any one of them. And if Spur were seen, she was sure they'd not give him a fighting chance. They'd shoot to kill.

"See any signs of him?" Slim Dines asked gruffly of Sammy Ennis.

"Nary," replied Ennis tartly.

"Miss Sue, I'll be obliged if yuh rustles us some breakfast pronto. Sammy, yuh ride hard out here so's Wendel can't sneak away. I'll spell yuh soon's I eat," Slim ordered as though enjoying his important rôle of deputy sheriff.

Sammy Ennis mumbled something under his breath, his face puckered in surly lines.

Sue Gartland glanced from one to the other of the three members of this questionable posse. Her first impulse was flatly to refuse to cook breakfast for them, but she glimpsed a shining point of that metal star pinned to Slim Dines' flannel shirt. She saw the avaricious smirk twitching the purplish-dyed beard of Seth Varney, the sulky, weak features of Sammy Ennis.

If there were only some way to outwit them! And why, oh why had Sheriff Clay intrusted a deputyship to such a despicable character as Slim Dines? Sue's opinion of the sheriff dropped many degrees. And Spur Wendel, why had he come back to the ranch? He might have known that his presence would only complicate matters. And then Sue recalled the full pail of milk, the feed racks stuffed with hay. Spur had done it because he was thoughtful

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and decent and splendid. He'd risk capture just to do her a kindness. He must be near at hand, perhaps watching her this very moment. That thought instilled fresh courage in the girl. Her brain ceased whirling and she nodded to Dines briskly.

"Breakfast? Very well, gentlemen! It'll be ready in fifteen minutes." Sue's sudden change of manner puzzled both Dines and Varney. They squirmed uncomfortably in their saddles, then climbed off when the girl started for the ranch house.

"Say, Slim, I want a word with yuh!" Sammy Ennis growled sulkily.

"Aw, wait'll after we eat, Sammy," retorted Slim flippantly.

"Nope! yuh come over to the bunk house now," insisted Ennis. "Varney kin go on with Miss Sue."

Slim reluctantly joined his companion. Sue, even more reluctantly at heart, though not showing her dismay, preceded Varney to the house. She saw that Sammy was sore about something. His sulky spells were notorious, and he stirred up trouble unless what bothered him was explained to his satisfaction.

Sue entered the house by the side door leading into the dining room, Varney close at her heels. When he followed her into the kitchen, she whirled about impulsively and actually pushed him back into the dining room.

"Stay in there! I can get breakfast without your help!" she exclaimed, shutting the door with a bang.

The fire was still burning, the pot of coffee steaming. Sue put in more coffee and filled the pot from the tea-kettle. She bustled about, slicing bacon and bread, getting out the eggs. She did it mechanically, her thoughts not on what she was doing, but groping for a plan whereby she could rid the premises of these undesirable bullies.

She had forked the nicely crisped bacon into a platter set upon the warming oven and was just breaking an egg into the sizzling fat when the dining room door was pushed open. Seth Varney's ugly head was thrust through, his narrow eyes blinking at the girl.

Sue dropped the egg into the pan with a spattering of hot grease.

"Miss Gartland, they's sumthin' I gotta say to yuh afore them punchers git back." He shuffled nearer, a little packet of papers pinched between his clawlike fingers and thumb. "It's them I O Us yuhr brother signed. Jest yuh sign them and I won't bother yuh no more about this murderin' business."

"You won't!" Sue forgot the egg scorching in the pan. "How can you help yourself if you're sworn in on this posse?" she asked.

"Er—waal, don't you worry none about that, Miss Gartland. I can manage it," he told her.

"Oh, you can?—But didn't you report what you saw last night to the sheriff?" Sue demanded.

He nodded his head, but there was a furtive cast to his squinting eyes which wasn't convincing. For a moment Sue's suspicions overwhelmed her. Was this visit by these bullying fiends a gigantic bluff? She doubted Slim Dines' legal right to display that deputy sheriff's star. But that would be impersonating an officer of the law; Slim wouldn't dare go that far!

"Supposing I refuse to sign those papers, Varney?" she asked.

"Then they won't be no mercy showed yuh. We'll git Spur Wendel and we'll git yuh; they's proof yuh're in cahoots. The grand jury'll investigate this here rumpus and yuh'll both swing fer murderin' yuhr brother." Seth Varney's purplish chin whiskers wagged up and down nervously.

"Varney, you didn't see Sheriff Clay last night, or this morning. This is all a miserly bluff on your part——" the girl began.

"Bluff?" Varney's high-pitched voice

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broke in on her accusations. "Look at these here papers!" He held out the small packet eagerly, avariciously. "It's money yuhr brother owes me; yuh'd oughta pay up his honest debts."

"Honest debts!" Sue cried out heatedly. "There's not an honest drop of blood in your veins, Seth Varney! You weren't sworn in on any posse. Slim Dines hasn't any right wearing that deputy's star. I know what your game is. You're trying to frighten me into signing those I O Us. Oh, you miserable cowards!" Sue Gartland darted toward the open doorway.

Seth Varney lunged for her, his bony fingers digging into her left arm.

"Yuh'll pay them debts, drat yuhr uppity airs!" He shook the papers in her face.

With an impetuous side fling of her right arm, Sue seized the long handle of the frying pan. She made a pass with it at Varney. He threw up the fist in which were clutched the illegal I O Us to ward off the blow.

The hot skillet smashed against his hand, showering him with hotter bacon grease. A deluge of the sizzling stuff saturated the packet of papers. He released his grip on the girl's arm.

"Yuh fightin' female fool! Yuh danged little wild cat!" he shouted. "Yuh'll pay fer this; yuh'll pay with yuhr life!"

Sue dashed past him and flew up the stairs.

Entering her room, she paused a second for breath and to control her quivering nerves. Then she ran to the chair upon which Spur Wendel's rifle lay. She picked it up, her thoughts running riot over what she believed to be a rank plot staged by these disgruntled bullies. Varney was trying to bluff her into signing over to him five thousand dollars as hush money. He hadn't gone near the sheriff; he'd hunted up Dines and Ennis instead. The three of them had hit upon this crafty trick to intimidate her. Of course, Varney had agreed to share the spoils with his partners in crime.

She'd show them just how badly intimidated she was! With the rifle clasped in her hands, Sue was about to rush out of the room and descend upon Varney, a desperate little fury, when the report of a gun echoed through the open window. She swayed on the threshold, a sickening sensation blotting out every vestige of wrathful indignation.

They'd discovered Spur! Had shot him!

Sue reeled away from the door and over to the window. That first report was followed by others in rapid succession. The din came from the neighborhood of the bunk house. Sue dropped to her knees before the window to secure an unobstructed view of the bunk house.

She witnessed a man catapult out of the door. He cleared the small porch in a mighty leap, sprinting across the open space between the bunk house and corral fence. He was running as though in mortal terror.

To the horrified girl, watching at the upper window, an eternity dragged by before a second man hurtled into view. He shot through the bunk-house doorway madly in pursuit of the first man who had sprawled into the saddle of one of the three ponies grouped in front of the barn.

"Slim Dines!" Sue gasped as she recognized the man mounting the pony.

She fastened her attention upon the second man. It wasn't Sammy Ennis. Sue leaned far out of the window, her heart stilled by the shock of the recognition.

"Spur!" she called his name, but in a voice choked and inaudible.

Slim Dines, plying quirt and spurs, was speeding for the milking corral. Sue hadn't closed the gate and the pony plunged through and into the corral,

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kicking up a cloud of dust. Slim forced the pony over the low bars in the fence beyond and they went bounding up the hill pasture.

Spur Wendel vaulted into the saddle of Sammy Ennis' pony, lifted his head and spied the girl leaning out of the upper window. He threw up his hand in a commanding gesture, his words carrying vibrantly as he pointed toward the bunk house.

"Sammy's shot—dying! Go to him quick—important, Sue!" Another wave of his hand and Spur bent low in the saddle and tore through the corral, skimmed the bars and gave hot pursuit to the fleeing Slim Dines.

"Sammy shot!" Sue crouched at the window in a daze. Spur the hunter and not the hunted! She couldn't imagine what it all meant. Events had flashed before her too rapidly. Finally Spur's directions about seeing Sammy brought her to her feet.

She hurried out of the room, descending the stairs two steps at a time.

"Hold up thar!" came the shrill voice of Seth Varney. She had forgotten him during the hectic scenes that she had just witnessed. She had forgotten, too, the rifle she had gone after. It lay upon the floor under the open bedroom window.

"Not so fast, yuh fightin' female fool!" Seth Varney stood near the bottom step, a six-gun grasped in his clawlike fist.

"Yuh'd spile my vallyble papers, hey? Scald me with hot grease, would yuh?" The fiendish expression of a crazed man glittered in his narrow gray eyes, as he covered the girl with the gun.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO TRAILS.

IN those few days spent in dodging the man hunters, Spur Wendel realized that he had done a foolish thing in running away from consequences. The impulse which had prompted him into declaring that he had shot Perry Gartland was heroic but unwise. He did it because, in that feverish moment after the fatal event, he had a hunch that Sue had pulled the trigger—whether accidentally or on purpose he hadn't stopped to figure out. He would have gladly given his life to save Sue from arrest and trial.

But hours of lonely thinking resulted in different conclusions. Sue didn't fire the gun which killed her half-brother. Neither was he, Spur, guilty, for he hadn't touched the six-gun in that deadly struggle. And if Sue had done the deed, she wouldn't have let him take the blame. Of that he was positive; and the more he thought about it, the more convinced he was that both Sue Gartland and himself were innocent.

Perry, then, was the one who was responsible for his own death. The longer Spur pondered over this angle of the tragedy, the more plausible it seemed. That was why he decided to return to Tumbling Rock Ranch. He simply had to talk the matter over with Sue. Even if they couldn't muster up sufficient proof to convince a jury that Perry had killed himself, at least they could know in their hearts that neither of them was a murderer.

So Spur turned his sagacious pony loose, and slipped down through the timber after dark. He was stealing along in the shadow of the corral fence just as Sue was ordering Seth Varney off the ranch at the point of a rifle.

Plucky! She was splendid, and Spur had wanted to tell her so, yet he didn't show himself. That old miser would carry his lies to the sheriff. The ranch would be picketed. But Spur wasn't to be frightened off by that prospect. He'd stay within call of the girl, protect her when necessary. But if she didn't see him, she'd have nothing to conceal when questioned by the sheriff.

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Spur selected for his hiding place the loft in the bunk house, a few planks laid over the cross beams in one corner. He spread a blanket over these planks and spent the night there, crawling down at dawn to do the few chores which had astounded Sue.

He'd scarcely climbed back into that cranny under the eaves, when Sue entered the bunk house. Already Spur had spied the approaching horsemen through a knot hole in the wall. Hard as it was not to answer her warning cry, he knew that his presence would only add to her terror. So he kept quiet, ready though to fight for her at the drop of a hat.

After Sammy Ennis had given the room the once-over, Spur had dropped to the floor, an eye to the crack of the door, watching every movement of that cowardly outfit. When Sammy and Slim started for the bunk house, Spur clambered up to his perch, six-guns fully loaded, fingers itching to punish these bullies for insulting the girl he loved.

Crouched a scant three feet above their heads, Spur listened aghast to unbelievable treachery.

Sammy Ennis, crossing the sill first, had wheeled and glowered belligerently at his tall and angular crony who opened up on him savagely.

"Now what's eatin' yuh, Sammy? Yuh make me sick, throwin' a fit jest when we stand a show to clean up on this deal. We're fired offn this ranch by her and no job in sight. How come?"

"Yuh're goin' too fur, Slim, backin' up that old skinflint in gougin' Miss Sue. I stood by yuh when yuh wished that thar murder onto Spur, me havin' no use fer him; but we'll git double crossed mixin' up with Varney. I'm through, that's all," Sammy Ennis said, scowling sulkily.

"Double crossed yuhr foot!" Slim Dines had shaken his fist under Sammy's nose. "If yuh're through, yuh kin beat it. But don't let yuhr jaw slip, git me? I ain't passin' up a thousand dollars cold, so put that in yuhr pipe and smoke it!" he commanded.

"Varney can't pry that money offn Miss Sue. S'posin' he done it, he'd never split with us, and yuh know it. He's that crooked. Yuh got away with that murder stunt which ought to do yuh without gougin' Miss Sue. She's allus treated me white."

"Aw, she fired yuh——" Slim began.

"She did not. I quit 'count of you. Now yuh'll git us both jailed flashin' bogus deputy stars and holdin' up Miss Sue. Cut it, Slim. Yuh know that I've got yuh over a bar'l," Sammy threatened.

"Yuh mean that yuh'd squeal on me?" the other demanded.

"Jest that if yuh don't lay off this holdup game."

"Yuh dirty skunk!" Slim Dines reached for his gun the fraction of a second before Sammy drew his.

The bunk house rocked with the double report. Then Sammy keeled over on his side.

Spur Wendel, his brain in a tumult with what he had heard, shoved his gun over the edge of the planks.

"Hands up, Dines!" he commanded.

Slim Dines, his face a twisted mask of consternation, looked up from the huddled figure of his bunkie, batted his eyes a couple of times, then threw up his hands, but not in surrender. Both guns roared; that was the fusillade heard by Sue Gartland.

Spur missed because his wrist was cramped; Slim because he was smitten with an unholy fear. The puncher charged through the doorway, Spur swung down from his niche.

"Hey!" A thickened groan caused him to waver. Sammy Ennis, wabbling on an elbow, was beckoning insistently. Spur swooped nearer and bent over the wounded cowboy.

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"Yuh was up thar all the time?" Sammy's voice broke.

"Yes," Spur told him.

"Yuh'll git him, then; he's yaller plumb through!" Sammy's elbow buckled and he slumped to the floor.

Spur delayed a moment; he was unable to tell whether Sammy had fainted or passed out completely.

Sammy's eyes rolled upward, his lips moved. "Go git him!" he said.

Spur went. At the door he glimpsed Slim Dines galloping through the corral. Got away with murder, had he? Wished the crime on innocent parties. Sammy's accusations weren't altogether clear. Had Slim actually seen the shooting and held back evidence which would have fixed the act on Perry Gartland? The thoughts spun through Spur's brain, as he ran for the saddled pony belonging to young Ennis.

And then he saw Sue Gartland, shouted to her, and immediately centered all his energies upon overhauling Slim Dines. Sue would hasten to Sammy, get from him a full confession before he breathed his last, done to death by his traitorous partner.

Spur rode hard for the corral bars, landed on the turf of the pasture, and the chase was on in earnest. Slim had a quarter-mile start, and was running like a scared coyote caught in the act of killing lambs. Worse than a coward—a miserable crook who'd stoop to bully a girl, fasten a murder upon the innocent.

"He'll not get away!" Spur's jaws set firmly. He didn't spare the speedy pony, but raked it with prodding spurs.

Slim had reached the bars in the far fence, smashed through them without halting. Spur urged his pony over the wreckage less than three minutes later. But, in that short space of time, Slim had dodged in among the pines which grew almost down to the fence line.

Fortunately the trees were scattered and Slim kept bobbing into view, so Spur lost scant ground in following his quarry. Each of the men was familiar with every foot of the range; their ponies were well matched as to speed and endurance. The pursuit promised to be heartbreaking to both man and beast.

Slim topped a low hillock and dipped into a cañon which cut up into the higher hills. When Spur gained the crest, a bullet zipped past his head. Slim had stopped behind a clump of pines down in the cañon bed and was firing at his pursuer. Spur whipped out his gun and charged the ambush, the enemy taking to flight after the first shot.

The trail twisted and wound up Tumbling Rock Cañon, never a straight stretch of more than fifty feet; but, at every possible vantage point, Dines squirmed around in his saddle and fired at Wendel. Spur was more chary with his bullets. He didn't have any ammunition to waste. Besides that, he wanted to capture Dines alive, wring the truth from those lying, cowardly lips. Otherwise, more than once, he could have potted Slim in the back as he was dodging around a curve in the trail.

On and on labored the ponies, higher and higher into the timbered range, the waters of Tumbling Rock Creek churned into white foam in their precipitous drop over the boulder-strewn cañon. At a narrow spot the trail divided, one branch crossing the turbulent creek, the second hugging the cliff and rising rapidly above the lower trail.

Slim Dines splashed through the water just as Spur swung into sight around a mass of boulders. Goading his pony into a trot, Spur plunged into the stream a half minute after Slim had disappeared into the alders screening the lower trail. The pony's iron-shod hoof struck a slippery rock and down it went, Spur jumping out into

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the creek. He got clear of the floundering pony but was bowled over by the current.

"What devilish luck!" he muttered aloud, for a hurried inspection showed a badly wrenched foreleg, disabling the pony. Added to this handicap, he'd dropped one six-gun into the creek and couldn't locate it. The second gun was empty, so was his cartridge belt.

His eye lit upon the neatly coiled rawhide reata buckled below the horn of Sammy's saddle. Spur grabbed it, hesitated a moment, with the water churning about his legs, then waded back to the fork of the trail and scrambled up the higher one.

This upper trail paralleled the lower one at a height varying from ten feet to twenty-five. It was rough and in places merely a narrow ledge, more fitted for a goat's passage than even a sure-footed pony.

Spur had tackled it only once before, mounted on Bo, his mountain-bred cow pony, a foolhardy stunt which he'd never attempt on horseback again.

Now, with the water squishing from his boots at each step, he picked his way at a fast trot, eyes scanning the brushy cañon bed for a glimpse of his mounted enemy. The roar of the rushing creek drowned out his own footfalls as well as the clatter of hoofs on the rocky trail below. There was danger of Slim's spotting him and picking him off that high trail with a well-directed bullet.

Spur proceeded cautiously, but at a pace which he believed was faster than Slim's toilsome progress over logs and through jungles of brush on the lower trail. He soon knew this for a fact, for, squeezing around a jagged shoulder of the cliff, Spur discovered the puncher almost beneath him, cruelly wielding a quirt. His jaded pony had balked before a landslide heaped across the trail.

Spur dropped to his hands and knees and crept along the shelving upper trail. He peered over the edge. Slim had dismounted and was tugging at the bridle reins, throwing panic-stricken looks down the creek bed. He was expecting Spur to approach that way. At last he succeeded in dragging his pony over the worst of the blockade, but by that time Spur was uncoiling his reata directly above him.

It was a twenty-foot drop, not a difficult trick for a clever roper to cast the noose over a man's head and shoulders. But Spur was taking no chances on muffing. He gauged the distance carefully, noted a near-by sapling he could use for a snubbing post, and then let fly the noose.

It settled squarely over the surprised puncher's shoulders and Spur, his feet braced against the small tree, threw his full weight against the rope, pinning Slim's arms tightly to his sides. A hasty turn of the reata around the sapling and Spur heaved till he yanked his victim out of the saddle and had him dangling at the end of his rope, a good five feet above the ground.

A couple of half hitches and Spur secured his end of the rope to the sapling. He leaned over and searched for a way to clamber down the steep cliff. There wasn't a foothold on the sheer wall within his vision. He was stumped for a few seconds, not daring to run back or farther up the trail, lest Slim wriggle out of the noose.

But there was a way down and Spur reached for the rope, lowered himself off the trail and descended the reata, hand over hand.

The soles of his boots were within six inches of Slim's head, when dirt and broken shale avalanched down the cliff. Immediately after that warning, the sapling was dragged from its insecure rooting, dropping both dangling men upon the pile of débris which blocked the trail.

Spur lunged for Slim who had strug-

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gled out of the noose. They clinched in fierce combat, rolling over and over and went crashing down among the brush choking the bed of the cañon.

CHAPTER X.

THE OPENING DOOR.

IT was the glint of insanity in Seth Varney's eyes which alarmed Sue Gartland even more than the black muzzle of the gun pointed at her head. She gripped the banister for support, her knees about to collapse. The old man had her at his mercy; she didn't dare step up or down the stairs lest he shoot, and, by the look in his eyes, he wouldn't hesitate to murder her on the spot.

"Bash me with a red-hot fryin' pan, will yuh?" he demanded, his purplish beard joggling up and down fiendishly. "Counted on spilin' them I O Us, hey, Miss Smarty? Waal, yuh didn't! Lookit!" He lifted his left hand in which were clutched the soiled and greasy scraps of paper. "I wiped 'em off so's the figgers and yuhr brother's name show good as ever." He brandished the papers at her, the gun wabbling in his right hand.

"There's no more argufyin' agin' it. Yuh'll make good them I O Us, woman. Come down them steps and sign these here papers. Come on!" He gripped the gun more firmly, the glitter in his eyes a menace.

Sue seemed to hear Spur Wendel's urgent plea.

Sammy dying! Important for her to go to him! Must she sign those miserable papers to get past the unscrupulous old miser?

What had happened over in the bunk house? Why was Spur racing after Slim Dines? It was maddening. She must find out at once. Sue's left foot groped for the next lower step of the stairway.

"Swear yuh'll sign these papers afore yuh move!" Seth Varney's cracked voice shrilled the command. "Don't try no more of yuhr fightin' tricks on me, woman. I'll shoot yuh soon's I'd plug a dog!"

The girl's fingers writhed on the banister. Her lips moved, but somehow she couldn't agree to those horrid terms. She shuddered at the hard, metallic points of light in Varney's gray eyes, shifted her own gaze, and suddenly an icy chill tingled her spine.

The side door was in the line of her vision, just behind Seth Varney. She saw the knob slowly turn and then the door swing in as though pushed by a cautious, furtive hand. It moved a bare inch, then another. It was uncanny. There was a pause, and then the door quietly moved again.

Sue's throat tightened. She wanted to scream, but couldn't. She could hear nothing save the rasping of Varney's breath; saw nothing through the crack of the door. She wondered who was opening it? Could it be Slim Dines returning after having murdered Spur?

It wasn't Spur himself! He would have charged in boldly, knocked the gun out of Varney's grasping fist, beat him into a whining pulp.

"Waal, I'm a-goin' to give yuh the same medicine yuh guv me, yuh dumb fool," Varney snarled at her viciously. "I'm countin' three fer yuh to make up yuhr mind to sign them papers, like when yuh run me off last night." He gloated over this clever idea.

"One!" he began.

Sue's eyes wavered from Varney's ugly face to that slowly moving door which the greedy miser hadn't noticed. It had swung open at least a foot, and still she could discover nothing on the other side.

"Two!" Varney's voice rose stridently, the glitter in those narrow gray eyes flashing in a blue flame.

Another shove of the door and Sue shrieked. The suspense had been too awful on her taut nerves. A man was

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crawling over the threshold—a man with a death's mask for a face.

"Thr——"

A shot rang out, cutting short Varney's last count. The old man screamed, clutched wildly at the newel post, his gun clattering to the floor. He clung to those greasy scraps of paper with his left fist, turning his head and mouthing at the man who had shot him.

"Yuh varmit!" he exclaimed, bending low to recover his weapon.

"Git his gun, Miss Sue!" Sammy Ennis lay on his stomach, his six-gun propped up by his elbow resting on the floor.

Sue sped down the stairs and snatched up the miser's pistol. Till that second she wasn't sure whether Sammy Ennis was friend or enemy. Even now she stared at him speechlessly. Spur had said that he was dying. He looked it, for his face was the color of ashes, his lips a ghastly blue.

"Sammy!" she cried, running over to him. "Oh, you're suffering! I was going to you, but——" she inclined her head toward Seth Varney.

"Yeah, I sabby. Tell him to git out, Miss Sue. I got no use for that carrion," he told her.

"I'm bad hurt," whined Varney, unarmed and gingerly feeling his shattered right wrist.

"Yuh'll be worse hurt if yuh don't git," threatened the doughty cowboy.

Seth Varney slunk out of the room, sniveling at each step. Sue followed till she saw him stagger over to his horse and awkwardly clamber into the saddle. She hurried back to the game little puncher.

"Mebbe savin' yuh from him'll help show yuh that I ain't all bad, Miss Sue," Sammy spoke painfully, questioningly.

"Yes, Sammy, yes; you're suffering. Oh, who shot you? Can you tell me what happened?"

"Spur knows; he got the low-down on Slim," Sammy winced in a spasm of agony. "I'm afraid that Spur mightn't git Slim, and I'm wantin' him fetched here so's I kin face him down before yuh both. Hang onter Varney's gun; it's loaded. Go herd 'em back here. I ain't gonna last long, Miss Sue." Sammy's lids went shut.

Sue rushed into the bedroom and brought out a blanket, easing the cowboy as best she could. She gave him a drink and applied bandages to his wound.

She was in a quandary. She was loath to leave the cowboy, afraid that he might die; yet she would have been arrested if the coroner's jury had believed his testimony. But Sue couldn't forget Slim's exit from the bunk house—Spur's pursuit.

Sammy beckoned her to be on the way. She went out of the house and sped across to the barn. She saddled her mare and, tucking the gun securely under her belt, rode out through the corral and headed for the broken bars in the line fence. She picked up the fresh trail through the timber and traced it to Tumbling Rock Cañon. From then on, it was a simple matter, since the two sets of hoofprints led directly up the creek trail.

Sue was greatly upset over the hectic events crowded into the past few hours. Everything was confusion in her mind. She shuddered every time that she thought of that last dreadful scene with Seth Varney.

The high-spirited mare sensed the girl's anxiety. There was no need of using quirt or spur. Sue had often ridden up this trail. Every now and then, through clefts in the cañon walls, she could see Tumbling Rock itself.

She wondered if Spur had climbed to its base—if he and Slim had met in fierce combat under that grim, legendary sentinel.

The mare was in a lather; going as swiftly as the rough trail allowed, but

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Sue's anxious thoughts traveled faster. She was taut with nervousness, when the mare forged around the curve a short distance from the forking of the trails. The mare's head went up, and the sensitive nostrils dilated in a nicker.

"There's Sammy's pony!" She gave a smothered gasp. "Spur! Spur!" she called, as she reined the mare down the bank to the edge of the foam-churned creek.

The racket of the water drowned out her frantic cries. She gave the pony a hasty once-over, noticed the wrenched foreleg, the animal having hobbled to dry land.

She glanced up the higher cliff trail. She couldn't imagine Spur's going that way, so she spoke to the mare and splashed through the creek. Crashing on through the brush choking the trail on the far side, Sue rode rapidly forward, keenly on the alert for further signs of Spur Wendel. She discovered the tracks of a horse in a patch of sand and reached for the gun tucked in her belt.

She came to a heap of débris, topped it, and pulled the mare to a halt. Slim's pony was cropping the tips of willows just beyond the landslide.

Both ponies without riders! She looked about for the two men. A movement in the willows below attracted her attention. She saw something gliding into the brush. It resembled a snake at first and held her breathless.

It wasn't a snake, but the end of a rope. It was slowly disappearing, drawn by some mysterious, hidden power. It was as uncanny as that door pushed open by unseen hands! Holding tightly to the gun, Sue slid out of her saddle and cautiously picked her way over the pile of rock and gravel. Staring down into the jungle, she detected the stooping figure of a man. The noise of the creek prevented his hearing her, but, as though attracted by a subtle summons, he straightened up and turned his eyes in her direction.

Without waiting for him to speak, Sue scrambled down through the tangle of willows, catching at a branch to stop her sliding descent when within a yard of Spur Wendel. Prone upon the ground at his feet lay Slim Dines, his arms tied behind his back with the reata, the loose ends of which Spur was winding in circular loops. All around them the branches were smashed and trampled upon, plain evidence that a terrible fight had been staged in this wilderness jungle.

"Sue!" Spur exclaimed, advancing. His clothes were torn, his face bruised, while leaves were sticking in his tousled mop of hair.

"Spur! Oh, I'm glad you're safe!" she cried, trembling in every muscle. After the siege she had gone through it seemed too good to be true to find her loyal friend alive.

"You shouldn't have come up here, Sue," he protested faintly, though the light in his eyes showed how glad he was to see her.

"Sammy's waiting for us. I'm afraid that he's dying, Spur. But he insisted on my coming. He wants you to bring Slim." She lowered her eyes to the man cringing among the wreckage. "He shot Sammy, didn't he?" she asked.

"Yes, and Sammy's alive!" There was relief in his exclamation. "Good! This hombre can't tell the truth." He prodded Dines with the toe of his boot. "Get up! Hustle out of this! Slim, we'll jolt the truth out of you yet!" Yanking on the rope, Spur succeeded in raising the badly beaten puncher to his feet.

Between them, Sue and Spur pushed and dragged Dines up to the trail. They caught up his pony and boosted Slim into the saddle, Spur tying his feet into the stirrups. Slim refused to open his mouth, and his captors worked

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almost as silently. Sue mounted the mare, and Spur got up behind her. And, driving Slim's pony ahead of them, they started back for Tumbling Rock Ranch.

"What's it all mean?" was Sue's first question after they crossed the turbulent ford.

Spur repeated all that he could remember of the dispute that he had overheard in the bunk house and of the gun fight which had followed.

"What did Sammy mean—saying that Slim wished the murder on you?" Sue asked all at sea.

"The same as I figured it out while I was hidin' here in the hills," said Spur. "You didn't shoot Perry; I didn't, so it must've been Perry, himself, who pulled the trigger which killed him."

"But how can we ever prove that?" Sue's lips went white. She'd been sure all along that Spur was innocent; was it possible to convince the sheriff, a judge and jury of the real facts?

"Slim and Sammy saw him do it. Slim says it ain't so, and now won't talk after claimin' that I done it. It's up to Sammy."

"Oh!" Sue touched the mare's flanks with her heels. "We've got to hurry. Why didn't I ask Sammy to tell me everything? It might be too late now." She struck Slim's horse with her quirt, goading the tired pony down the rough trail at a lope.

It was grilling work, that return journey to the ranch. The trail down Tumbling Rock Cañon seemed to lengthen into unending miles. Sue was too agitated to talk. Again and again, she lashed the pony just ahead of her, the mare trodding along hard on its heels.

They covered the last mile in a run, riding through the hill pasture, neck and neck. Sue slowed up as they entered the corral and kept the mare at a walk till they reached the ranch house. She had the feeling that their very lives depended upon whether or not Sammy Ennis was able to talk.

She dropped out of the saddle and ran to the side door. She paused and looked back at Spur, throwing him a mute message of courage. He was untying the ropes which fastened Slim's legs to the saddle. As he forcibly dragged the puncher off the pony, Sue pushed open the door and peered into the room.

CHAPTER XI.

PURPLE SHADOWS.

HER heart skipped several beats when she saw the cowboy lying on his side, in the same position she had seen him last. He was motionless now, apparently without a breath of life in his body.

"Sammy!" Sue crept across the sill, her voice hushed, but throbbing with supplication.

She came nearer and remained tense and horror-stricken till she heard the thump of boots on the porch. She stifled a sob, blaming herself for not staying with Sammy, hearing from his own lips the confession which would have saved Spur and lifted the cloud from her own name.

Spur appeared in the doorway, the muzzle of his gun digging into Slim Dines' ribs. The top hand cast a searching glance at the prostrate figure of young Ennis.

Sammy Ennis opened startled eyes.

"W-where'm I at?" The startled expression faded when he glimpsed Slim Dines. He slowly rose on an elbow, scrutinized the puncher from head to foot, then turned to Spur Wendel.

"Did he tell yuh the straight of that murder, Spur?" he asked.

"He still claims that I done it," replied Wendel.

"He does, huh?" Sammy's ashen lips trembled, whether from weakness or fury it was difficult to state. "Look

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here, Spur, yuh seen him plug it to me, didn't yuh?" he inquired.

"I sure did," said Spur shortly, earnestly.

"And I seen him just as plain plug Perry Gartland!" Sammy told them.

"Slim!" cried Sue, aghast. "You saw Slim shoot Perry?"

"I did that, Miss Sue," affirmed Sammy. "I was standin' right beside him—we was watchin' you-all scrappin' fer that gun. Slim draws his gat outa his holster, sticks it into his coat pocket and whangs away——"

"He's lyin'," broke in Dines sharply. "It was like Spur claims, Perry shot himself. I lied at first. But this is straight! I seen who had the gun. It was Perry. It went off when he was holdin' it. Honest!"

"Honest nothin'!" chipped in Ennis. "Take a squint at Slim's pocket, powder burnt, showin' where the bullet went through. He aimed to git yuh, Spur, him wantin' yuhr job. He was scart stiff when he seen Perry drop. Then yuh up and allowed yuh done it and Slim most passed out, that tickled to git shed of the killin'."

"Spur!" A cry of thanksgiving came from Sue Gartland. "That's the truth. Oh, I know that it is." Then she turned to young Ennis. "But why didn't you tell what you knew at the inquest, Sammy?" she asked.

"Well," Sammy's pain-distended eyes flickered. "I didn't cotton much to Spur. So me and Slim talked it over and figgered that if we sorta blamed yuh, Miss Sue, Spur'd take his medicine if he was ketched and nobody'd ever git wise to Slim's bein' the killer. Slim was my bunkie."

"Why'd you go back on him, then?" questioned Spur.

"Him and Varney was fer double crossin' me. Anyhow, Slim'd got away with enough dirty work on you and Miss Sue. I ain't much better'n Slim at that, but I draw the line somewheres. I reckon that the jig's up with me and I'd be scart to kick off 'thout spillin' this offn my chest. What I'm tellin's straight. Slim got me 'cause he was quicker on the draw, but he pulled a plumb yaller trick in shootin' the boss and wishin' it onto Spur." The truth told, Sammy Ennis lost his grip on the slender thread which had kept him alive. His arm crumpled beneath his weight and he slipped into unconsciousness.

Sue attempted to revive him, but he was past mortal aid. Spur tenderly assisted the girl to her feet. Guiding her to the outer door, he led her to the end of the porch, then stole back into the room.

"Slim," he spoke brusquely to the puncher who was cowering against the wall, eyes fixed in a terrorized stare upon the lifeless body of his bunkie. "I'm leavin' you in here, alone with Sammy. Looks like there's just one thing left for you to do, come clean same's Sammy done."

Spur shut the door and hastened out to where Sue was watching the changing lights upon the western range of mountains. She looked up at him when he stood close by her side, the blue of her eyes reflecting the purple tints of that long, wavering shadow which was creeping out from the base of Tumbling Rock.

"Somehow, I knew that everything would come out all right, Spur." Her fingers fluttered to his sleeve.

"Well, I was stumped for quite a spell, Sue," he admitted honestly.

"Um, so was I; but we'll be happy from now on, Spur. For, look, there's Tumbling Rock guarding our valley. Isn't it a splendid sight?" she asked.

"Sure," agreed Spur, looking at the girl and not the mountain.

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Redwood and Gold

By Jackson Gregory

Author of "Treasure in the Hills," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

A MINING prospector and very adventurous man, Lord Jim Glennister, acquired from Andrew Hathaway his ancestral homestead, on which gold was reputed to be hidden, in order to spite his enemy, Jet Norcross, who also had designs on the place. Glee Hathaway and an ancient servitor of the family, Danny Jennifer, were the only two who loved the Hathaway home. On the night that Glennister took possession, they were about to leave, when Glennister was suddenly shot by some one from outside. The wound was slight, but decency compelled the two to remain the night with him.

CHAPTER V.

FAIR EXCHANGE.

DAYBREAK found Glee Hathaway and Dan Jennifer in the kitchen, preparing a frugal breakfast and talking in whispers, guarded in every word and every movement not to awaken the sleeper. He was at the farther end of the big house, several rooms intervening and all doors shut, yet they went on tiptoe and spoke in hushed voices.

"He's a tough customer," said Jennifer. "I've heard enough of Lord Jim Glennister to know that. And you wouldn't need to be told who he was to come at what breed of dog he is. He's not hurt bad enough for us to have to stay and look out for him any longer; and the best thing for us to do is be off before he's about."

"He's worse than Jet Norcross!" she retorted with subdued passion. Even to speak of him put a hot flush in her cheeks. "Yes, we'd better hurry, Danny." There she broke off and sighed.

Softly, melodiously, like gently tapped silver bells, the notes of a piano were wafted to them through the silence of the house. Their sleeper, then, was already up and about! For it could be no one else. His room, the "guest room," always in hospitable readiness, though

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guests were almost as rare here as dollars, adjoined Jennifer's. It had been Dick Hathaway's in the long, dead years, and gave entrance down a narrow hallway to the music room. He had wandered that way, and the old grand piano had caught his eye.

He was fingering the notes idly, carelessly, with one hand only. The two in the kitchen looked at each other curiously. Then their eyes wandered away as though they could aid their imaginations in picturing him at the piano. He was not using his left hand; that was because of his wound. His whole side must be stiff and sore.

Yet there came the bass notes now; the same idle carelessness, yet a certain nonchalant sureness about the touch, too. There were a couple of haphazard chords, a pause, a rippling strain of melody. He had noticed the sheet of music where she had left it a week ago. She had not touched the piano for a full week; there had been so little singing in her heart.

"'Drink to me only with thine eyes——'"

He was singing now. His voice rose higher, clear and true and very sweet; it filled the house and overflowed it, and again caused those who heard it to look strangely at each other. The girl stood a moment as if spellbound; softly she went to the door, opening it. The golden flood of his music pulsed more strongly now. It asserted itself compellingly, and yet was all lingering tenderness. When the last note died away and the house fell silent again, it was not the same silence as before.

They heard him coming on toward them through the empty rooms, his heavy boots sounding noisily upon the bare floors.

"What ho!" he called cheerily from a distance, with some two or three closed doors still to open before he came to the kitchen. "Ahoy, there, my two good friends, Doctor Jennifer and Nurse Hathaway! I'm lost, I tell you; lost in the sleeping palace of the——" He flung open another door and appeared; saw them, and called out: "Good morning, Beauty of the Sleeping Wood! Good morning, most patriarchal Jennifer."

He gave them a new and unsuspected Jim Glennister to think about. He was pale and haggard from last night's experience, yet neither of them marked that for some little while. The striking thing about him was gayety. He seemed actually to sparkle with rare good humor, to tingle with some fine, spontaneous zest. He greeted them with a flashing, friendly grin and in a merry voice. He looked a full dozen years younger than last night and, with that swift smile illuminating his face, the harsh and sinister lines vanished. Nor could any glint of hardness linger in eyes so utterly gay as his were now.

All too little music had Glee heard in the sequestered years of her life, but she loved it as few mortals do. It alone could awaken something deep, very deep within her and set it thrilling. The song of a mocking bird opened the windows of her soul. With shut eyes, she listened for hours to the rustle of the forests; in falling waters and splashing brooks, she heard fairy orchestras. And no music had ever caught her so by the throat as had this man's singing at the old piano. A look of pure wonder was in her eyes raised to his. If she had first known him through his singing and his touch upon the piano keys, instead of as she had seen him last night, it would have been very hard for her to accept Lord Jim Glennister upon the reputation which he bore. Even now, she was finding it bewilderingly difficult to reconcile the musician with the predatory adventurer.

It is seldom that two young people exchange a regard so perfectly frank. He, too, was reappraising her. In place of last night's flickering firelight, he had

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now clear daybreak and quiet. But hers was an even more piquant beauty in this clearer, fuller light. And for the moment there was a look in her eyes, turned on him as honestly as a child's, which he had never seen in any girl's eyes before; a deep gravity, a vague wonderment.

"Well?" he asked curiously, "and what do you make of me?"

She started, blushed hotly as realization swept over her and turned away, the spell broken by his abrupt question.

"We were getting ready to go," she remarked.

"What were you two saying about me just now?"

She wished that Jennifer would speak up. But the old man was content with silence, his deeply sunken eyes watchful of Glennister's every look and gesture. So, with a hint of annoyance and without turning from the table where she bent over their simple breakfast preparations, she said, "We were making our plans, speaking of——"

"Of me, along with other bothersome affairs," he interrupted. "Only natural, since I come in the rôle I do. You don't deny that, do you?"

She denied nothing.

"You know we were about to go last night," she said.

"Oh, I remember well enough. Going in the devil's own hurry, until I got in the way of a bullet. After that, being human, of course you had to stay and see me through," Glennister told her.

"Your wound doesn't seem to be troubling you much this morning," she retorted. "And so——"

"You're free to go? Well, I suppose so." He came on into the room and sat on the far end of the long table, one leg swinging. His eyes darkened and grew piercing; then, of a sudden, cleared, and he began to laugh. Obviously he was not only in a rare good humor this morning, but meant to remain affable. "Last night I threatened to tie the two of you up, rather than let you desert me, didn't I? Ever notice how a fellow who may be rational enough during the day is apt to go to extremes by candlelight?"

Even though he had only an eloquent silence for answer, he remained unruffled. He did, however, lift his black brows quizzically, though his smile lingered.

"Oh, I'm not so bad as you two tried to make me out just now," he chuckled. "Just a roughneck. You'd get used to me, you two, if you'd only stick around. Who knows but that I'd even make your fortunes for you? By the by, Jennifer, do you mind if I fill my eyes with the glory of that piece of rock?" he asked.

Jennifer took it from his coat pocket and put it on the table.

"It's yours," he said quietly. But Glennister, watching him like a hawk, saw how lingeringly the old fingers relinquished it.

"You bet it's mine!" He took it up and fell to examining it closely. "I paid enough for it, to begin with; took a bullet for it on top of that, too. Oh, I say, Miss Hathaway, am I invited to breakfast?" he asked.

"What little breakfast we are having," she said with just a hint of bitterness, "comes from the garden. It's your garden, now."

"Mostly apples," he commented amusedly. "Apples and water and what else? If you'd stay on for lunch, I'd promise you better fare. I've a man coming out with a load of provisions. Oh, well, you know the old adage: 'Better a feast of herbs where love is——'" Again he fell to chuckling. "So you intend to eat and run, without ceremony? At least, do you object to letting me know where you are going? If ever there were two real babes in the woods, I see 'em here this morning! Have you really any place to go?"

She hesitated before replying, yet

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came very close to glimpsing his real mood. Beneath the laughing good nature there was a bit of soreness. His wound irked him doubtless far more than he gave sign of. It was now that she saw how drawn and haggard his face was. Further, he was blanketing his own inner irritability, which she herself and Jennifer were furthering by their own attitudes. Hence, while he laughed at them, he was not above a bit of enjoyment could he plague her. Yet, after her brief hesitation, she gave him an answer; for thus she could come the most direct way to that which she meant to say to him.

"We are not going very far," she said stiffly, "though you can scarcely be interested in what we do, Mr. Glennister. About four miles from here is an old cabin on a bit of land which belongs to me; it was my grandmother's, then my mother's; mine, now, and never, at any time, a part of the acreage which you are buying."

"In the redwoods, close by Dryad Pool, I'd bet a man!" he cried, watching for the rush of color to her cheeks.

She ignored that, going on more swiftly: "In the old home here are a number of things which I had hoped to remove before Andrew sold. Things which, I understand, become yours now. I don't think you would care very much for them; they could mean nothing to a—to you, and could be of little use. I have some money of my own, and I'll be glad to pay you anything you like for them, and move them to my cabin."

"Come, that's reasonable," he agreed heartily, yet there remained the sign of mischief in his eyes. "Heirlooms, eh? Precious trinkets never to fall into a vandal's hands! The old musket with which grandpapa killed the Indian; the family album and the cradle over which I stumbled this very morning? An old dressing table which came around the Horn in '67, and which has a secret drawer in it!"

She bit her lip and turned away from him again.

"I think, Danny——" she began.

"You'll never turn any big business deals, young lady, until you learn to suppress that raging temper of yours. I haven't said no, have I? And you've got some money, all your own, to pay for all this? How much, now, I wonder?" he interrupted.

She went to a shelf, took down a tin can, and from it brought a pad of bank notes.

"Five hundred dollars, which Andrew sent me from the proceeds of the sale."

"My money, asking to come back to me! Why, here's luck," said Glennister.

"You will allow me then to take the things I want?" she asked.

"You are not going to carry them on your backs, you two valiant adventurers?" was Glennister's inquiry.

"There is a big wagon in the barn. There are the two horses."

"All right," grunted Glennister. "All ready to go, eh? And in hot haste. Well, I'll drive a bargain with you. You take what you want; anything in the house, and I'll name the price! I can't swear to the legality of the transaction; but who cares about the law so long as we get what we want, both of us? There's the mortgage, but I fancy it's on the land alone, so Norcross has nothing to say about it and it's up to you and me and brother Andrew. What about the piano?" he asked.

"Danny and I could hardly move it," she told him, her eyes level upon his own.

"So the piano stays; good. It's most devilishly out of tune, by the way, but I've a notion I can remedy that. Well, we'll nibble our apple and carrot—— A bowl of strawberries? Better and better! And then we'll harness our gallant steeds to the family chariot, load in our lares and penates, and be up and away. It only remains to agree upon the price."

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"Anything which you say, Mr. Glennister. The articles which I want to carry away are priceless, to me," Glee told him.

"Oh, I'm the man to see that you pay plenty," he laughed back at her.

Breakfast, on the whole, was a failure. Glennister alone had anything to say and presently he grew silent and thoughtful. He took up the bit of quartz, with its streaks and seams and pits of soft, yellow, precious metal, and seemed to forget his companions in his study of it. He carried it away in his hand when he left the room, saying over his shoulder:

"I'm off to my room for the makings of a smoke. You two will want to get your horses and wagon and start loading. Go as far as you like and, when you've done, come to me and we'll make our trade."

It was some three hours later when she came to him, leaving Jennifer outside with the horses and the wagon load of furniture and odds and ends which she had chosen to take with her. She found Glennister lying on his back on the broad couch in the living room, smoking cigarettes and seeming deeply concentrated upon the little vanishing rings which he sent up toward the black oak beams.

He pretended not to be aware of her approach; but she knew that it was pretense, that he got some sort of impish pleasure in making her stand there awaiting him, in forcing her to announce herself. For an instant, she was about to turn swiftly and go out. But she remembered the wagon load of household goods and said quietly, "I am here, Mr. Glennister."

He turned, sat up, and flipped his cigarette into the fireplace.

"Why didn't you agree to marry Norcross?" he demanded sharply.

She looked at him wonderingly, more amazed than indignant.

"I am ready to go now," she said.

"Wouldn't marry Norcross, even at the price he offered? Well, you showed your good sense there. But we have other considerations before us, eh?"

"Yes. If you will see what things we have packed——" she began.

"What was Jennifer prowling around in the night for?" he surprised her by asking in his abrupt way of introducing unrelated matters.

"I didn't know that he was. Hadn't you better ask him?"

"Oh, he was all right. Even into my room, while he thought that I was asleep. Well, he didn't offer to cut my throat for me, so we'll let him go unhung. Didn't see anything of the Norcross crowd while you were out for the horses, did you?"

"No, I suppose they have gone," Glee told him.

"Where? Where would he go? Has he some sort of a hang-out near?"

"I don't know." But, though she had intended to stop there, she did add briefly: "He could not stop within two or three miles without camping on our —on your ranch. I do know that some months ago he was prospecting or pretending to prospect upon government land off to the north of us."

All the while he had not risen. Now he sat back the more comfortably, thrust his long legs straight out in front of him, and regarded his boots thoughtfully. Of a sudden he looked up at her with his somewhat impudent grin.

"I thought that 'Wee Glee' was the devil of a name to give any real girl while I watched Andrew write it down, but it just suits you! Or would, if you'd just let yourself go a bit. You're mighty proud, prim and proper with me, but I'll bet that by nature you're as gleeful as a cricket. It's both a joy and a surprise to find a girl like you way out in this wilderness, do you know it?" he asked.

He had the trick of making her blush. She hated herself for her confusion and

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him for being the cause of it. She was little used to men, and had had no experience at all with a man like Lord Jim Glennister. She saw his eyes brighten delightedly.

She turned quickly and without a word went out. He sprang to his feet and came hurrying after her.

"Look here, young woman, we haven't done our business yet."

"I'd far rather have you keep the whole of my five hundred dollars than do any business whatever with you," she said hotly.

"How do you know that I wasn't going to demand the whole five hundred anyway? Were you thinking to melt me with your dimply beauty and so beat the price down?" he retorted.

She had not stopped and did not answer. He came up with her again in the kitchen and put a detaining hand upon her shoulder. She quickly shook it off, but stopped now, her eyes blazing.

"You agreed to pay what I asked," he said coolly. "You can't go off in a huff with all your plunder without keeping your word."

"I told you that you could take as much money as you liked——" she began.

"Money! Who said money? Money hasn't anything to do with it; there are other ways to pay! Think I am going to rob a poor little, heartbroken country kid of her last nickel, and for a handful of such things as you are taking? I won't have a penny of your dowry, fair maid; but I will take my pay like any Shylock," he told her.

"I don't understand!" Glee exclaimed.

"But you think you do," he chuckled. "You think that surely the wicked man, having the innocent maiden in his foul clutches, will surely take advantage of her distress and helplessness as any bold bad man should do; especially when he is as highly appreciative of your wildwoodsy charm as Jim Glennister is! No, Miss Wee Glee, whether you will be relieved or only piqued that you are not asked to pay the price in beauty and sweetness, it remains that I have something quite different in mind. You are merely to be decent to me for a short time; say a week in all. During that time there is to be no nonsense on my part, only business. I need your help and Jennifer's and you are to grant me that. For this consideration, the wagon load and as many more as you like are yours. There's my proposition for you to take or leave."

He had her fairly there. She thought of her treasure to be saved thus from vandals, from him or Jet Norcross. She could have other things carried to safety; they meant nothing to him and so much to her.

"How can we help you?" she asked.

"By telling me a lot of things I want to know; by indicating to me the property boundaries; by answering my questions, some of which I have in mind already, others which will suggest themselves."

Still she hesitated; and though finally she did say, "All right," it was reluctantly. He merely nodded, but kept on regarding her intently. Of a sudden, all unwillingly, yet none the less clearly, did she see that his was a position in which he might have easily made a greater demand. For, at least, he was refusing to take her money. And so she added hastily, "And I thank you, Mr. Glennister, for letting me have these things."

"Now, that's better," he laughed, and she knew then that he had been waiting and perhaps wagering with himself that she would or would not thank him. "You will be busy upon your own affairs to-day. I'll be loafing within doors, giving my hurt a chance to heal over. But to-morrow morning, you and Dan Jennifer will drop in on me to spend the day. Now, I'll step out for

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a word with him, and you are free to go."

She slipped past him and hurried out to the wagon. Jennifer was on the high seat, holding the reins. Glennister came out into the yard as she climbed up to a place at the old man's side.

On the instant, Glennister was given fresh matters to think upon. He was not three paces advanced toward the wagon when there burst upon the morning stillness the crack of a rifle, and a bullet cut whistling close by his head. It missed him so narrowly that it could scarcely have missed Wee Glee Hathaway more than a yard or so. Both sprang to one side so that the wagon with its load stood between them and the edge of the forest from which the shot had obviously been fired. Old Dan Jennifer sat where he was, his hands firm on the reins, his voice quieting the horses.

Glennister's face went white; with fear, thought the girl, and small blame to him. Death had come very close to him. But, as she now caught the flash of his eyes, burning like little fires under his drawn brows, she read in them only a terrible, unmistakable anger.

"You two be on your way," he snapped savagely. "There's no danger to either of you. Do go. The fool could have knocked either of you over before I came out; and he's apt to do it yet, shooting at me, if you stick around this morning. And don't come back until I say. I'll look in on you when I am ready."

She looked at him wonderingly. Before his few words were uttered, his anger had seemed to pass, his color was normal, he was cool and quiet.

"I don't know what to do! To run away and leave you—to leave any one——" she began.

"Go," he said, and was very curt about it. "I can look out for myself."

"At least one of us will get word to the sheriff," Glee said.

His laugh was short and crisp; it was not the deep, rumbling laughter of the early morning Glennister.

"No, thanks! In the first place, I don't want the law sticking its nose into my business, when that business has to do with Jet Norcross. And secondly, there's nothing a sheriff could do here. Who'll swear that it was Norcross who fired either shot? Who'll swear that he was even on the job here? Think he isn't ready for a thing like that? Or think any sheriff on earth is going to spend his summer here, keeping men off? You just simply keep out of this, young lady," he commanded.

"Oh, all right!"

She climbed up beside Jennifer and did not look back. But she heard the door slam shut, and knew that Jim Glennister had leaped back to shelter and, by now, would be running through the house for his own rifle.

CHAPTER VI.

GOLDEN RESOLVE.

DANNY! Oh, Danny, dear! Try, try to remember!" Glee urged.

But the old man only shook his head and looked at her with sad eyes.

"It's no use; no use," he muttered. "How can a man remember what he doesn't know? What he never knew?"

But she was insistent. New hope thrilled her. He had never seen her so eagerly in earnest.

"But, Danny, you must! They say that we never truly forget anything. You remember what Andrew was reading us only a week ago? How there are two parts to our minds; how it is as if a little gate locked one from the other, and how it can click back like the shutter of a kodak? Somewhere, somewhere maybe deep down in your mind, you know *something!* Think, Danny; think hard!" the girl insisted.

He shifted uneasily. A look almost of fear swept into his eyes.

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"What do you mean?" he asked sharply. "That I'm holding out on you?"

She ran to him and went down on her knees beside his bench.

"No, no, no! Of course not that. How can you think such a thing? Oh, if after all we could only be the ones to find it!"

It was late afternoon, a time of dim dusk among the redwoods. They were in the old moss-green cabin on that bit of wild land which had been Wee Glee Hathaway's mother's, because as a girl she had loved it so, and which was now Wee Glee's own, and for the same reason. Just behind rose the steepening flank of the mountain with the stately brotherhood of giant trees making their eternal aisles of greenery; and down from the mountain cut a flashing stream. The sturdy log cabin stood where once a great log had fallen across this narrow, steep-banked stream. Fifty years ago, that fallen tree had offered itself as a natural bridge; later it had become one of the monster joists supporting the rude plank floor and the thick walls. Straddling the creek bed, a dozen feet above its rocky bottom, it was ever filled with the singing voices of the headlong water. One came up to it either by steps cut in the steep banks or, from the other side, by a winding path along the wooded slope. Thus front door and rear door were reached, and there was one other approach of which Glee Hathaway alone knew. Childhood must have its "secrets," some of them being cherished and clung to when childhood itself is behind.

They had hauled their belongings here in a roundabout way, fording the creek a mile below, following a winding and long-abandoned road through the forest to the cabin. Now the place looked like a bit of home transplanted here, and now, for the first time, they could sit and talk of what had been uppermost in both their minds all day.

"You keep thinking of what Jet Norcross said; that I was the one who led him to find it," said Jennifer. "That was just venom; his natural viciousness. To try to hurt me, whom he has little reason to like, by making me think that I had served his purposes somehow."

"But he told the truth, Danny! And the truth again when he said that it was six months ago," Glee eagerly remarked.

"I thought that over during the night. Six months ago?" Again he shook his head sadly. "I don't remember anything," he repeated.

"But I do! Jet Norcross came to see us just about six months ago. It was the dead of winter, and he stayed and stayed, even when he knew that he wasn't welcome. You remember that, Danny; and how, when at last he must have known that Andrew would have to ask him to go, he had an accident, a sprained ankle, and stayed another week!" Glee reminisced.

"Ah, of course! A sprained ankle!"

"You see! We are going to begin putting one and one together! Why, think, Danny, we've even seen the specimen which Jet Norcross left behind! You, who know every foot of this land, won't be long figuring out just where that came from. It can be done, Danny, and we can do it. We've got to do it," the girl continued.

They looked deep into each other's eyes then, the girl all bright eagerness, the old man looking troubled and uncertain.

"Jet Norcross has kept his mouth shut all this while," she ran on, "because he's careful and crafty and was playing for big stakes. But last night he was so sure of himself and of having won the game, that he thought his need for caution was over."

"Cautious or not, the man would lie because lying comes natural to him," Jennifer told her.

"But he wasn't lying when he said that it was six months ago, Danny! It

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was at that time, don't you remember, just a few days after he left us that he looked Andrew up again and offered to make the loan and took the mortgage. We all wondered how he came by such money all of a sudden; now we know. He took it from the old lost mine! He only gave Andrew what was already his own."

"Prove that," muttered Jennifer, "and there is no mortgage! Instead, we'd have Norcross over a barrel, shown up for a thief and a swindler."

But she was hurrying on, to make her final point.

"He was telling us the truth, Danny. We're sure of that. And so I am just as sure that he told the truth, when he said that it was through you that he came to find it. Now wait; you're asking how in the world you could have shown him the way when you did not know it yourself? You must have gone out each morning, prospecting, as you have ever done; and he must have followed you. At some time during the day, you must have come very close to making the discovery, Danny. And he, dodging and sneaking after you, found what you just missed. And so, don't you see what we've got to do now? We must remember just what points of the ranch you visited during the couple of weeks that Jet Norcross was with us last winter."

His hands were folded over the head of his curiously carved staff; for a moment, he sat with his head bowed upon them, very still and very silent. He sighed and at last looked up.

"I gave up last night," he told her.

"But we're not going to give up any more! We've our chance now."

"What chance? With Norcross in the position he holds; with the ranch already sold to Lord Jim Glennister?" the old man asked.

"Mortgaged to Jet Norcross who stole grandfather's gold to make the loan! Bought by Lord Jim Glennister, who counts on finding grandfather's gold and using it to make his payments with! They are thieves, Danny, both of them. They have no right."

"Right, my dear," said Jennifer, "doesn't always win."

"It does," she cried passionately. "It must. In the long run it will. Look at it this way, Danny: This man Glennister has only six months in which to find the gold, or he forfeits what he has paid Andrew and all claim to the ranch with it. Norcross has only his mortgage, and it is six months before that will mature. Suppose we find the gold, you and I; suppose that we let Lord Jim Glennister forfeit his rights—and they are not rights at all, but wrongs, Danny. Then, before Jet Norcross can make trouble with his mortgage, you and I tell Andrew everything. We buy back the ranch ourselves. We can have the old home, safe for always and always."

The old man sat brooding. Suddenly there came a flash into his sunken eyes.

"That specimen——" he began.

"It was very rich, Danny?" the girl interrupted eagerly.

"Only in my dreams have I ever seen such stuff, my dear. Across the years I've dreamed many and many the time of coming to it; of finding it like that."

"We'll work it out together, Danny. You know how one thing suggests another. We'll talk of last winter; of when Jet Norcross came; of what we did and said; of how we spent our days. We'll find that where we thought we had forgotten, we'd only laid our memory aside a little while. And before we are done, you will remember which parts of the ranch you went to."

"And what will Jet Norcross be doing? And Jim Glennister? They will be watching. They're not the kind of men to let a thing like this slip by the ends of their fingers. You and I, a girl and an old man, against men like them."

"But we'll have the right on our side," Glee reminded him.

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Maybe. Yet, since Glennister has bought and paid down a pretty big first installment, it looks as though on his side he'd have the law."

"The law!" she scoffed. "I don't care a snap about the law, Danny. We're going to have what's ours."

Jennifer rose and went to the front door. From there, one had broken glimpses down shadowy green aisles through the forest, and heard the water falling, cascading down a rocky spillway, tumbling into a shady, circular pool.

"What was it you told me on your way here?" he asked quietly. "About an understanding you had with Glennister; a bargain, to help him in payment for the things he let you have."

"Oh," she said blankly, "I had forgotten!"

She followed him to the door where they stood side by side.

"The cards are stacked against us," he said dismally, finding speech after a long while. "It's either Lord Jim Glennister to win and bring his wild crowd here to carouse and gamble, or Jet Norcross to beat him to it, Jet Norcross and his girl Judy."

"No! No, I tell you, Danny. Haven't I said all along that they are worse than wolves? As to my bargain with that Glennister man, he cheated me!" she exclaimed hotly. "For a wagon load of odds and ends not worth fifty cents to him, he'd have me trade away our chance of everything! That's really not fair, and I just won't do it!"

"But if you told him you would?" the old man questioned.

"I've a right to change my mind, haven't I?" demanded Glee Hathaway, righteously indignant.

Glee Hathaway, a distant look in her eyes, set about getting the scanty evening meal. The homely task, a rather difficult one, too, with things as they were, recalled her thoughts to everyday matters.

"Danny," she said, "we'd better hitch up early in the morning and drive out to the store; we've nothing to eat, and I've plenty of money now."

Jennifer, from where he stooped rummaging among his own litter of personal belongings, said curiously:

"Yes; oh, yes. And I want to get me a new prospector's pick. Mine doesn't seem to be here; we must have forgotten to put it in."

She agreed in a manner sufficiently casual to accompany so natural a suggestion. Yet there was an odd look of perplexity in the eyes which, turning swiftly, she hid from him. Dan Jennifer set her wondering. His picks had a way of vanishing. During the last half a dozen years, he had managed to get rid of an amazing number of them. She recalled that the last had been six months ago—he had vowed that Jet Norcross had stolen it.

"I looked for it at the house before we left," he confessed presently. "Do you suppose that Jim Glennister stole it?"

CHAPTER VII.

AMBUSH AND APPLEGATE.

GLENNISTER dashed through the house for his rifle and came racing back into the kitchen. Never was a man more eager for an exchange of hot lead. The game, which his erstwhile friend Jet Norcross meant to play with him, was sufficiently clear for any man's comprehension and Jim Glennister vowed that he was ready to take a hand.

He jerked the back door open, stepping swiftly to one side. Across the kitchen garden he could see the wagon, the old man and the girl upon the high seat. Beyond them was the encircling forest, sun-smitten, yet a place of many dark, shadowy places in which men might be lurking. The fellow who had fired that shot would be there some-

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where; Glennister had but a general idea of just where. At a considerable distance, that much was certain, because the whistling bullet had come from across the open fields. Half a mile at least, he hazarded; say a thousand yards.

Save for the crawling wagon, never was a landscape quieter. A shot had rung out, but had been a mere ripple in the silence. The great stillness returned to brood like the spirit of peace itself.

Glennister left the door and went to a window; then to another. He could hear Dan Jennifer calling out to his horses. A moment later the wagon disappeared up the winding track, lost among the trees. Thereafter only Glennister's quiet footfalls emphasized the silence.

"I'm all wrong," he muttered disgustedly. "That's all for this morning."

He closed the door, dropped its bar into place, and returned to the big main room to think it over. He made himself comfortable in an easy-chair by the fireplace, stood his rifle at hand against the rock chimney, and indulged in a meditative smoke.

Essentially this Jim Glennister was a gambler. But then, there is a suspicion abroad in the land that all men are gamblers; that with various individuals it is but a difference in degree. Where one is reckless, another is cautious; where one is skillful, another is clumsy; where one is unscrupulous, another has his standards and sticks to them, making a godhead of fair play. With some the game is a means to an end, with some a clean-cut side issue, with some it is life. Into this final category fitted Lord Jim Glennister.

When a boy, when the old order of things obtained in Reno, Glennister had stood in the Palace gambling hall and watched the tall stacks of twenty-dollar gold pieces. He had seen them wax lofty and had seen them melt away. Natural phenomena, like sunrise and sunset. One did not weep when the sun went down; he knew it would rise again. He did not go mad with ecstasy when it rose. It would have its setting and night, after all, had its moon and stars.

As the gleaming stacks of twenties had waxed and waned like little golden moons before his eyes, just so had he seen mining towns boom up from small beginnings, make a merry din through their brief, hectic existences, and vanish from the face of the earth. He had been passingly interested in certain cavernous excavations which other men had conducted in the shell of the earth. He had known some of these burrowings to cast forth their Pactolian streams, and some, like hungry mouths, to swallow vast fortunes. He had had his fling among them now and then, like a man playing the races, putting his money on the long shots. Win or lose—sunrise and sunset.

So the game he played now with Norcross was no new game. And yet, like all the old games, it had its novelty. One never knew. And further, he had "felt" all along that this time he took the supreme hazard, that the stakes were the highest. Life itself, death itself! He meditated upon the two shots. There Norcross tipped his hand. The first attack spelled only blazing, murderous anger, perhaps. The second, after a night to cool a man's wrath, bespoke a set and determined desperation. It said: "I'm here to stay. I'll stop at nothing. I'll balk at no crime in the calendar. I'll run any risk. And I don't care how soon you know it."

"Why did Jet Norcross offer to marry her?" Glennister asked abruptly of the silence and emptiness about him.

Out of emptiness and silence he had his answer as he remembered her as she had stood in this room before him only a few minutes ago. He saw her almost as clearly now as he had seen her then. It was as though her eyes again looked

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straight into his. Honest and frank and fearless, the kind of eyes one liked to look into. Pleasant and with a sense of grateful coolness, like cool places in her own woodlands. Yet not always cool, come to think of it; hot flashes came their way. They were soft gray but, being so full of life, were changeful like life itself. One thought of violets and springtime and all that sort of stuff, mused Glennister. By the way, how they had shone just after he had been playing and singing. Liked music, eh? Loved it, rather. If he had her here now with him, how he would like to look straight into those eyes of hers and sing to her. He'd watch her eyes change; he'd make 'em change! They could be very soft, wistful, tender.

"And Jet Norcross, dirty dog that he is, wants her along with everything else!" he reflected.

He drew a certain satisfaction from reflecting that Norcross had a man-sized job on his hands in that direction. That girl, now, wasn't going to drop into the first man's hands like a ripe peach. Yet it remained that Norcross, as Glennister knew him, was a persistent and resourceful devil; and that women had made much of him. So, from grim satisfaction, Glennister passed into frowning uncertainty.

He shrugged. The slight lifting of his shoulder sent a twinge of pain through his side. His thoughts, withdrawn from all minor considerations and side issues, concentrated upon business. Just now he could consider himself besieged; well, that was all right. He had need of a bit of quiet while his wound healed and its soreness and stiffness departed. His stronghold was of the sturdiest, walled like a medieval fortress, with shutters of thick, ax-hewn planks. There were ample provisions for a day or two, while more were due to arrive to-day.

That was all very well but, before an hour had passed, he began to grow restless. He got up and went to the old piano, banging out a few chords. In the great hush of the empty house, the notes sounded painfully loud. He quitted the piano and made a tour of the rooms, visiting every nook and corner, looking to the fastening at each door and window. What a queer old house it was! Long hallways, dusky with the shutters closed; a step up from hall to bedroom; a sharp angle here, another step there. From the room he had occupied last night he went through the little anteroom or small hall and on into Dan Jennifer's room. He paused here, pondering. What had the old fellow been poking about for in the dead of night? Just a cup of water? He had been mighty stealthy for that, stepping so quietly in his bare feet, yet going so urgently on his business. Glennister regretted that he had not crept out of bed and followed him.

He came on back to the living room at last, down three short steps from what he termed a "den" and what the Hathaways spoke of as the grizzly room; there was a big bear rug, home tanned, on the plank floor. Here, as in so many parts of the rambling house, were cupboards innumerable; one given over entirely to guns, for the most part, looking of the days of the spinning wheel. Many of the cupboards were filled with books. Glennister took down a number at random, glancing at them curiously. No really up-to-date volumes. Many of them had been printed in London previous to 1850 and had "Richard Hathaway" written in a copper-plate hand on the flyleaves. There was everything from stock raising in Australia to diamond mines in Africa and the old poets.

"The girl has a decent ancestry," he judged.

In the late afternoon, the creak and rattle of an approaching wagon made music in his ears. Solitude had hung heavy on him; forced inactivity made

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him feverishly eager to be stirring, to have something, anything, happen. As he went to the door he was expecting to see the old man and the girl returning for a second load. Then he remembered the order for provisions he had placed with the forty-mile-distant storekeeper after dealing with Andrew. Here were his supplies: Flour, sugar, bread, butter, tinned milk, coffee, bacon, ham, tobacco, matches and ammunition, a jumble of canned goods. Glennister, watching all this come on, smiled his satisfaction. In a state of siege it was a most comfortable thing to have such an addition to one's larder.

The man who brought him this delectable cargo, one Ab Applegate, turned out to be an individual of superlatives. He was very short, very fat, very red and very talkative; also, very inquisitive. His eyes were bright and blue and fairly popping with curiosity.

"Pile off and come in," called Glennister. "A word with you before we start unloading."

Ab Applegate left his horses standing with drooping heads and made haste to accept the invitation. His eyes took in every detail of the stranger's appearance, then went roving hastily, prying into all the corners, probing at closed doors.

"You're Jim Glennister. Well, I've heard a lot of you," he remarked.

"You're apt to hear a lot more before I move on," said Glennister dryly.

"I better put the horses up first," the other suggested.

"You'd better listen to a couple of words, my friend. I've got nothing against you that I know. So here's a tip. There's some gent out in the woods taking a pot shot at me every half chance he gets. In case you happened to stop a bullet meant for me, I wouldn't have you blaming me for it," Glennister told him.

Applegate regarded him with most interested eyes. Yet there was no flicker of surprise in them. He even nodded through the whole explanation.

"I know. Thought that I might get here in time to give you the tip. I was to bring you a message, saying that you could look out for that," he said.

"A message? To me?" Glennister's brows shot up sharply. "Who sent me any message and what was it?"

"Jet Norcross sent it," said Applegate. "Know him, don't you?"

"I thought that I did," said Glennister, eying the messenger strangely. "You make me wonder!"

"Saw him out at the store early this morning——" the man began.

"Forty miles from here?" Glennister snapped at him. "This morning?"

"That's it. Early, before I started."

"Look here, Baby Blue-eyes," said Glennister, curt now and plainly suspicious, "I don't want to get you down wrong at the beginning. You may be telling the truth and you may be lying like a horse thief, and I want to know!"

Applegate opened his eyes still wider.

"Lying? Why should I lie about a thing like that?" he demanded.

"Let's have the message," was Glennister's reply.

"Short and sweet! Norcross was at the store and saw me getting ready to come out here. 'When you see Jim Glennister,' he says, 'tell him that I said he better keep his eye peeled. A man we both know and that Jim had trouble with before, out in Nevada, has followed him into this neck of the woods and has swore to pop him off the first show he gets.' That was the message, Mr. Glennister."

"Any one else see Norcross out at the store? Or just you?"

"Why sure there was others. Bill Connors, he's the storekeeper you know, was talking with him. So was Mrs. Connors. So was Jet's girl, Judy," Applegate told him.

"Just Norcross and his girl, eh? No one else in their party?"

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"Two more," said Applegate. "Injuns! I know 'em both, named Starbuck and Modoc."

"And they were forty miles from here this morning, when somebody took a shot at me?" grunted Glennister. "Who did the shooting, then?"

"The guy that Norcross said to look out for, of course," returned Applegate. "That's quite easy. See anything else likely?"

"I see a nice little alibi for Jet Norcross! I came pretty close to calling you a liar just now. But I'll take it all back. Thinking it over, I'm not even surprised any longer. And I'll bet that Norcross let out what his next plans were? Where he was going?" Glennister asked.

"He did. Off to Eureka, the four of 'em. They were arranging to leave their horses there and take Connors' carriage out of the mountains."

"Some more alibi," said Glennister with a little grunt of contempt. "There'll be plenty to see them go out, and none to see them come back."

The fat, rosy-faced man was far too alert to miss the point.

"You and Norcross are after the same thing?" he inquired, his head tipped to the side in the frankest curiosity. "The Hathaway gold?"

Glennister laughed at him and gave him for answer:

"If I were you, I'd be careful how I went poking around outside, that's all. Whoever is doing the shooting is doing it from a safe distance and he might make a mistake. By the way, is Norcross much of a friend of yours?"

"Not in particular," said Applegate.

"Know much about him?" Glennister pursued the subject.

"Good deal."

"He has a good many friends among the Indians? Such as Starbuck and Modoc?"

"Sure; squaw man, once, you know. His kid girl's mother was full blood. Sister to Modoc and Starbuck, they say."

"Are the Indians pretty fair shots?"

"Better'n fair, most of 'em. They live on deer and bear meat, in and out of season," Applegate replied.

"Ought to be able to bring a man down from the edge of the forest yonder?"

"So that's what you mean? That Norcross left a pet Injun behind to do for you?"

"What I mean is this: It's too far for you to go back to-day, so we'll bring in the boxes and cook a dinner. Then we'll have a friendly game of cards," Glennister suggested.

"Not on your life," exclaimed the other, both hands up. "Not for money, anyways. I've heard of you, Jim Glennister."

Glennister laughed again and went for his rifle.

"Come ahead; let's get the wagon unloaded," he said.

"And take a chance, huh? On drawing a shot?"

"Tell me the truth," chuckled Glennister. "You wouldn't mind knowing yourself if he's still out there, would you?"

"And to find out you got to offer him a target? All right, come ahead! Only, this being your party, you go first," And Applegate showed how spry he could be upon his feet by galloping like a playful baby elephant to a place just behind Glennister.

They went out into the yard where the wagon was. They were partially screened by this vehicle itself from the edge of the woods. Applegate appeared brighter-eyed than ever, glancing expectantly in all directions.

"Nobody there," he whispered, not for any fear of being overheard, but because some tense quality of the moment commanded. "Quiet as a chur——"

The bullet which corrected his mistake and cut off his words passed, with

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its pretty scream of rage, between him and Glennister. And, since the two men stood scarcely more than a yard apart, it was as close as Ab Applegate had any wish to have it. He went down to his hands and knees behind the wagon so swiftly and silently that, at first, Glennister thought that he had been shot through the head.

This time Glennister saw a little puff of smoke. It rose and idled away upon the quiet afternoon air. He jerked up his rifle and began drilling holes in the ferny undergrowth, firing as fast as he could work the trigger. When he had finished, as was told by the little metallic click when the last cartridge was exploded, Applegate reared up and demanded, still in that whispered voice: "Got him?" And when Glennister did not answer, he insisted: "Got him? Must have! He didn't shoot more'n once, did he?"

"Want to go out and see?"

"I'd like to; honest, I would." Applegate scratched his head and then shook it reluctantly. "I'd never rest happy until I knowed if you did get him and who it was. But I guess I'll wait," he remarked.

Glennister ducked by him, running into the house for fresh ammunition. At his heels came Applegate, slamming the door shut. Like an angry bee pursuing him came a second bullet. Its impact was lost in the slamming of the door, but they had visible demonstration made by the flying splinters Applegate dodged, as a man must, after the thing was over. Then slowly a look of satisfaction dawned in his blue eyes. His uncertainty was over, his curiosity satisfied.

"You missed him. Didn't get him at all," he cried out.

"Well? You look tickled to pieces over it," growled Glennister.

"Man! I just wanted to know!" the other protested.

They heard the wagon creaking. There was a thud of trotting hoofs. Applegate ran to a window and peered out with one eye.

"A runaway," shouted Glennister; "my provisions going all to smash!"

But Applegate turned a contented grin upon him.

"Watch 'em! They been here before, old Jolly and Jingo. They're off to the barn; just scared enough to wake up and hit for the manger. And that's good, for one of 'em might have got hit with that gent shooting wild like this. Let 'em be, I say. We'll go out after dark and drag the grub in."

Glennister, though he went to the window, did not concern himself with the cleverness of old Jolly and Jingo. Instead, locating the spot from which the little puff of smoke had risen, he treated himself to the sole possible luxury of pouring another half a dozen shots into it.

There came no response from the forest.

"Got him?" Again he was all burning curiosity, like a child. His chubby face actually puckered as he turned it up. It was almost as though he were saying in so many words: "What did you go and do that for? You're the mischief of a man."

Glennister, frowning down at him abstractedly, could not long be unconscious of a face like that. His lips twitched, his frown fled, he began to laugh. He put his rifle down and went back to his chair.

In the dusk, their appetites prompting—and perhaps Ab Applegate's lively curiosity having its finger in the pie—they went out to the barn. The wide, double doors stood open; horses and wagon were safely inside. While Applegate busied himself with unhitching and then feeding, having brought grain with him, Glennister got the various boxes and bags down. And, without adventure, they soon transferred the entire load to the house.

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Applegate made himself very much at home. Standing among the litter of comestibles, his round eyes darting from package to package, investigating and approving, he rolled up his sleeves.

"I like to cook and I'm good at it," he confided. He got a fire going and began making his selections. "By the way," he demanded, "where's the folks? Andrew's beat it, I know that. But the old man and the girl?"

"Gone," said Glennister.

"Oh," said Applegate. He went to the table with an armful of bundles, set them down and asked: "Where?"

"Away," answered Glennister.

"Oh!" He scratched his head, sighed, looked reproachfully at his host and sighed again. But there was a look of determination, almost of stubbornness, upon his round face. He but postponed the moment; he'd have to come at his quest from some new angle.

Meanwhile he was so far from idle that, in twenty minutes, Glennister was invited to sit down to a sizzling hot and invitingly savory meal. Applegate had spoken truthfully; he was a good cook.

"Want a job, Applegate?" asked Glennister, at the end of the meal. "Steady?"

"Doing what, Mr. Glennister? Playing target?" the other asked.

"Cooking, general housekeeping and chores."

"*And* being shot at? A man would have to charge extra for that."

"*And* finding things out," laughed Glennister. "A lot of things. To a man of your inquiring mind, life out here should afford certain mild interests."

He might laugh, but the chubby face confronting him was very earnest and sober.

"Wonder if you got him that last time? He's been mighty quiet since——" he started to speculate.

"You see!" Glennister exclaimed, smiling at him. "You'd be taking chances, if you stay on with me. But think of all the things that you'd be in line to find out! Where Norcross went and why, and when he is coming back, and where he'll hide himself, and who it is left behind to pop me over, and where Dan Jennifer and the girl went, and if there really is any Hathaway gold, and where it is, and who is going to get it!"

The earnest, eager face seemed to brighten with every word that Glennister spoke.

"I'll stick a day or two, anyway," said Applegate quickly, as though afraid that the offer might be withdrawn. "Until we find out for sure if you got him."

"And who he is and how many he's got with him," Glennister prompted.

"It's risky business, I can see that. I've heard of you, you see. Also, I know a thing or two about Jet Norcross, and I've come pretty close to being shot twice already since I got here!" the other hesitated.

His eyes were roving all the while, but now stopped suddenly and grew, if possible, more prominent. On the shelf across the kitchen was the bit of quartz which Norcross had left behind. Applegate saw it clearly by the light of their little fire. He got up and went for it; he lifted it, and scratched at it.

"Heavens!" he gasped. "Where'd that come from? Hathaway gold? There is a mine here then? The old yarn's true? You've found it?"

Glennister burst into rollicking laughter. Applegate actually began to blush.

"As to wages, now," said Glennister.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THREAT.

A FEW days of this sort of thing—living cooped up within the four walls of a house—went a long way with Jim Glennister. Now, with his wound

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behaving nicely and giving him less and less annoyance, he meant to be stirring.

"I'm going out to-night," he told Applegate, while the latter was washing the dishes from the evening meal and whistling one of those ancient, doleful ditties which he so favored at moments of well-fed contentment. "And I don't expect to be back much before daylight."

"Where are you going?" Applegate demanded immediately. "What are you going to do? What's the idea of being out all night?"

"And," continued Glennister quite as though Applegate had remained silent, "you'd better lock up tight and sleep with the old shotgun handy. And don't open up to anybody until you've made sure that you're opening to me."

Applegate's interest knew no bounds as he watched his employer's preparations. What a pack that was for a man to carry on a one night's jaunt! Ammunition, tobacco and matches, conveniently pocketed; a couple of heavy blankets in a tight roll, and inside provisions to last a good trencherman a week.

"Sure you're ever coming back?" gasped Applegate.

"Not sure, but hopeful," laughed Glennister. He had been taciturn and grim all day long, but now his spirits were winging. One knee upon the bundle which he was roping, he glanced up in rich enjoyment of the look that he had succeeded in bringing to the eyes glued upon him. "By the way, my dear Abner Applegate, to play square with you, I'll tell you a secret. On the mantelpiece in the big room is a stack of books. In the second book from the bottom of the stack there are a couple of bank notes. In case I shouldn't get back, they're yours. They'll pay you for your strenuous labors since you've been here," he told him.

"I'd sort of like to come along, Mr. Glennister. I'd carry the shotgun; a shotgun's worth a dozen rifles in the dark. Buck shot, you know."

"Can't be done this trip. You're to hold the fort and be ready to raise the portcullis when I sing out." He took up his pack and rifle and went through the house to a side door, Applegate bearing a candle and following close at his heels. "Shut and bar the door as soon as I'm out. And now good-by."

He slipped out quietly. There was no moon, but the night was bright with stars, the sky clear. He heard the bar dropped into place; then, after some minutes, Applegate's heavy tread going back to the front of the house. Still Glennister did not move, but stood close to the wall. It was dark here; he had chosen this exit because of the big apple tree shadowing the wall and part of the garden.

He hitched up his pack so that one shoulder through the rope carried the weight and left both hands free. There was the garden with its few old trees and a sagging trellis or two; his eyes probed into every shadow-filled spot. A dozen men might lurk here, unseen. They'd look for him to come out sooner or later; and at night, too.

So Glennister, when at last he stirred, moved warily, very warily. Where the forlorn garden ended, the orchard proper began. He did not stop again until he stood under the last of the fruit trees. He looked back upon the dark mass of the house; a shower of sparks from the big rock chimney swirled upward, sparks among the stars. He looked forward; yonder, as black as ebony, stretched the forest. But, between him and its shelter, was a wide clearing. He stood calculating, balancing chance and mischance.

He looked down toward Wild River. The spring which rose at the back of the house and formed a meandering little creek, gurgling down to a junction with the larger stream, was fringed with willows. Glennister could have wished

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them taller, thicker, with fewer open spaces between their clumps. Yet they invited; they pointed the way that he should go. Down to the river, then upstream. So he turned back into the orchard until he came to the creek.

Ten minutes later he was on the bank of Wild River. Its wild, uproarious voices were in his ears; its spray showered him with diamonds. Tall ferns rose about him; the fragrance of the rich, damp soil came to him. The trees stood higher here, broader branched against the glitter of stars. Progress onward from here should be fairly simple and reasonably safe. Even his tread made no sound above the shouting of Wild River.

He held close to the stream until he had traveled a high mile into the hills. He was done with the clearing now, passing like a shadow into the heart of the very domain of shadows. Wood fragrances came and went in gentle puffs; there was no wind, but the soft air was restless—like himself. He had stepped from a summer night into a night of late spring. Faint, vague perfumes rose from herbs trodden underfoot. Flowers bloomed on here long after their gentle sisters out under the ardent sun. The earth was moist, fruitful. Now and then, the thickly leafed branches overhead shut out the stars, only a dim, wan glow lessening while not dissipating the gloom. He slipped deeper into the forest. He went more swiftly now; with less stealth and more assurance. At any moment he might run into one of the Norcross party. He had counted all along on having to do with more than one man. Yet he had now what Jim Glennister called an even break. His eyes in the dark of the forest were as good as any other man's, so were his ears. And if it came to half-blind shooting, odds were even. They could know no more of his presence here than he knew of theirs.

Yet he remained tense and watchful. A score of times, hearing a sound not of his own making, he came to a dead halt to peer about and listen, rifle raised. The woods were full of life. There were rustlings in the branches above him, odd, scratching sounds against the bark, heavier treads breaking dead sticks, wee noises that were scarcely more than whisperings against the stillness. There were all about him the forest creatures who slept with an open eye; and those who hunted in the dark, all but noiseless on soft pads.

From seeking out the thick of the wood he soon came to turning into the more open places, where he not only made better speed, but less noise, keeping clear of underbrush all that he could. Even so he could make only a blundering sort of progress, having no such intimate knowledge of the lay of the land as to aid him in this expedition. And he was hard beset to do what he had set out to do, to keep so exactly his sense of direction as to come straight upon his first objective—that spot at the edge of the forest from which some gentleman had fired down upon the house. To have walked straight to the place by daylight would have required perhaps ten or fifteen minutes. To come at it as Glennister attempted now, by going out of his way first, up the river, then turning into the forest and beating back, breaking his trail into a series of angling lines, was the matter of a couple of hours.

But, when at last he drew near the spot, there was no mistaking it. He had marked it too well for that, before starting. From the thickly timbered mountain slope a low ridge thrust well forward to the open fields, broken down abruptly at the end, blunt-nosed, like a promontory cut off by the wash of old ocean. A grouping of big pines crowned it. There were large boulders under the pines; a straggling smaller growth ran down the sides of this higher land to a gully on each side. A

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very logical spot to serve the purposes of a sharpshooter; from here one had a wide view whence he could watch any attempt at approach from in front. So long as he kept his enemy in front, it should be for the hidden marksman a rather pleasant and secure occupation. But now Glennister, having gone to considerable pains, came to it from the rear.

In other words, from the mountain slope back and above, and through taller timber, he came down toward the blunt nose of the ridge. He rid himself of his roll now, hiding it behind a tree trunk in a patch of brush. There might be no one there to welcome him, and yet it remained that there might be the warmest of all possible welcomes awaiting him.

Again he proceeded slowly and with infinite caution. At every quiet step, he stopped and listened. He made a zigzag approach, stepping from tree to tree, pausing, peering out in all directions.

There, suddenly, was a sound crashing out to make him whip back, leaping to one side, pressed up against a big pine, his rifle at his shoulder, all in one instant. Enough racket for a dozen men, a wild flurry of commotion, a breaking headlong through a thicket!

Glennister lowered his rifle with a grunt, then laughed softly. With the rest of the din had come a low, "woof!" to tell him a very great deal. He had disturbed a bear, startling the animal into wild flight.

When Glennister went forward again, it was in full confidence that now he had the ridge to himself; the ambush was deserted, as he had supposed it would be; the bear's presence here told him that.

So in a few steps he came to the spot where his assailant had lain all day in watch for him. There was little difficulty, even at night, in discovering the exact spot where the fellow had made himself comfortable. At the base of the pines, among the boulders which stood up to a man's height, was a small, rudely circular area thick with its mat of fallen pine needles. Glennister, looking out across the lower lands, saw the dark blot of the old house and its trees, even made out a spark now and then flying skyward from the chimney. Ab Applegate would be sitting up, listening to all the little night noises, waiting and wondering.

Glennister went down on his hands and knees, groping about. He was not long in coming upon an exploded brass cartridge. Had he needed assurance that he was at the right spot he had it now. He found further some scraps of food, a bit of meat that had been flung aside as being too fat for the marksman's taste. Doubtless the bear had sniffed these fragments and had been about to satisfy a natural curiosity.

Striking a match, holding it cupped in his hand and close to the ground, Glennister sought further signs. Finding nothing more to interest him he looked at his watch. He had been out for nearly two hours and a half. He stood up and went back for his roll.

He had learned something; not a great deal, yet something. And every little scrap of knowledge might come to be of value. He knew that some one had spent the day here; had come early in the morning, prepared and provisioned for a day of it; had gone away again, no doubt, as it grew dark. He would have approached this spot as Glennister had done, from the woods, along the crest of the ridge. He would have gone away along the same track, back into the forest. If he returned to-morrow, it would be just before dawn and over the same ground.

So much for exact knowledge and logical surmise; after these, mere speculation. The man might not come back here at all; in all likelihood, he would prefer to play safe by shifting his base of operations. In any case, it was no

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part of Glennister's plan to stay there all night; at least not to-night. With his roll on his back, he struck into the woods again. And now he sought out the old wagon track and the trail which he had followed from the redwoods, when first he came to the Hathaway ranch.

Once, at a spot which he marked well, making sure that he would have no difficulty in coming again to it by day or night, he stepped aside into a tangle of dense shrubbery and disposed of his roll. Well hidden against any casual eyes excepting those of the wild folk, there he meant it to remain until he might have use for it. Then he struck out in the direction of a certain well-remembered pool under the redwoods.

He found the pool only after so long a search up and down, back and forth in the dark, that he was beginning to doubt that he could ever come at it by night. It was the gentle splash of the waterfall which finally led him to it. Dark and still, it mirrored a single star whose rays penetrated the lofty screen of greenery separating earth and sky; and even as his eyes caught the sparkle and flash, the single reflected star vanished.

The cabin was near; so much and no more he knew. He stood looking in all directions and, on every hand, saw only the black mass of the forest. He listened, hoping to catch the sound of voices. Unlikely that, he realized. Far more likely that by now both those whom he came to visit were asleep. Yet, listening, he peered all about him, hoping to catch a glint of light. Light? When they had neither candle nor lamp?

Just then a light winked out at him, made a small, intense glare and, like the star drowned in the ghostly pool, was gone. He moved slowly forward. He had no doubt glimpsed a light in the cabin, a candle after all, perhaps, carried by an open door or window. It remained possible that here was Norcross or one of his party. So he went silently and watchfully.

He could have put out a hand and touched the log wall before he made out with his eyes the dark outline of the cabin. All was dark within. He listened, but there was not a sound. He groped his way to a door and rapped.

"Who is it?" came a startled voice.

"It's Glennister. I came for the first of our little talks."

"It's so late," came the protest.

"I couldn't help that. It seemed healthier for me to do my knocking about after dark."

He had silence for his answer.

"Will you let me in?" he asked impatiently. And, when still an answer was slow in coming, "A bargain is a bargain, you know."

"Wait a minute. Yes, I'll let you in," was the answer.

He could hear her moving about now. Presently came the faint scratch of a match, a dim glow through a chink, a brighter gleaming light. A heavy bar was lifted; the door opened.

Glennister, from his place at one side the door, entered swiftly and closed the door behind him. His eyes, dark and keen, went flashing about the room. The girl stood before him, a lamp in her hand. The chamber was small, with a closed door at the further end. Her tumbled bunk was at one side under a small, open square window; there was a similar window, which also stood wide open, at the other side of the room.

"By your leave," said Glennister. He dropped the bar back into its place and stepped quickly to one window after the other. There were heavy plank shutters like those at the old home, and he closed both. Then he took time to look at her more particularly. He was ready to smile. She was very grave. He added lightly, "I never did fancy being in the full light inside, giving the other fellow a chance to hang around in the dark and whang away at me."

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Her eyes were not in the least friendly. From being utterly uncommunicative, they appeared now merely to express a somewhat contemptuous suspicion that he had allowed himself to develop a case of nerves.

"If you are thinking of Mr. Norcross," she said in a voice as aloof as her eyes, "he has gone."

"So you knew? I wonder how?" he questioned her.

"We have been outside, Danny and I. We just got back."

"I didn't see or hear you pass."

"We did not go by the house. There is another old road."

"Longer and rougher, maybe? But more to your taste, since it did not bring you my way?" he asked.

For a little country girl, who could not have seen much of the world, thought Glennister, she had a world of poise. She could look at a man as though she were gazing abstractedly into space.

"You came to ask me something?" she said steadily.

"Shall we sit down? Do you mind if I smoke?"

She affected a mild, very natural and indifferent surprise.

"Is it necessary to ask my permission for either? The other day it didn't seem so," she remarked.

He knew what she meant. He had been willfully rude to her and she had given him not the faintest hint that she even knew rudeness when it was offered her. But she had known and had treasured it up against him.

"Oh, that," he said carelessly. Then he laughed softly. "Circumstances alter cases, Miss Hathaway. We were in my house then; we're in yours now. A man in his own castle has the right to be as great a roughneck as he has the hankering to be. You'll note that here, with my hostess, I even call you Miss Hathaway."

He stepped by her and dragged a bench forward. And then he made her his profound, mocking bow.

"Will you be seated?" he asked.

There was but the one bench in the room. So she drew back and sat on the edge of her bunk. Glennister accepted the bench.

"I assure you that I'll not smoke without your permission."

"Oh, do as you please! What do you wish with me, Mr. Glennister?" she demanded.

"Thanks." He rolled his cigarette swiftly; his head was down for an instant and, when he lifted it, his eyes twinkled into hers. "I came, as I have already intimated, to ask you a question or two," he remarked.

"Yes, what are they?"

Before answering, he again took stock of the little room and its contents. There were parcels everywhere.

"Evidently you intend to continue a neighbor," he said lightly. "I see that you've been laying in a stock of provisions. So have I. Also, I note that you've been buying some pretty dresses. I'll bet you've been trying them all on!"

The little dress she wore now, very simple yet very gay and most becoming, was clearly as new a possession as her black silk stockings and black pumps. Had her mood been different, could he have coaxed the flash and sparkle into her sober eyes, she would have been most adorably alluring. One knew that she was stubbornly drawing a sheath over her natural vivacity.

"Your questions, Mr. Glennister?" she pressed the point.

"Why the haste? I've been consumed with boredom. Won't you be just neighborly?" Glennister hesitated.

"We'd hardly ever be that, I think. And it is late!"

"Oh, all right. Question number one: Where did you buy the gowns? Hardly at Bill Connors' dinky store!"

He could not know how tense she was inwardly all the while; how she had

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been expecting and dreading his call; how, to her, his very coming was an adventure; how hard it was for her to match his cool assurance. Now, at last, he struck a spark which she could not keep hidden; her cheeks flushed up hotly.

"I'll answer any question that——" she began.

"That I ask! Even though you don't see its immediate bearing. First off, still on the trail of a pretty lady's personal purchases, you've been as far as Eureka, haven't you?"

"Yes! But——"

"Just to buy clothes? Or to see good brother Andrew?"

She bit her lip which, when she slowly relinquished it, was scarlet.

"I didn't sell you my soul—nor all my own thoughts—nor the right to interfere," Glee expostulated.

"Granted. But remember that we agreed on our price, and at a time when I might have charged you your whole five hundred dollars. What thanks am I getting for my generosity?" he asked.

"Generosity! I'd rather it had been the five hundred!"

"All right." He put out his hand. "Give me the five hundred and we'll call it square."

"You know it's impossible now. I'll give you all I have left, gladly," the girl told him.

He laughed in the rarest good humor.

"The original bargain has to stand then. I go on with my questions. By the way, where's Jennifer?"

She glanced toward the closed door at the end of the room.

"Asleep. We've had a hard day, getting home late."

"Fair enough. I can talk with you to-night, with him at a later date."

"It was understood between us, I think," she reminded him, "that whatever help you thought you could have from me was to be given during one week. That was four days ago."

A sudden frown gathered his brows and made his eyes night black.

"You're against me!" he said sharply. "You'd keep to the letter of the contract and the devil take any spirit of fair play! What have I done to make you want to see me lose out? Teased you a bit, maybe. But that's your fault; you inspire it somehow. What's happened? You haven't thrown in with Norcross, have you?" he asked.

"I told you that Mr. Norcross has gone."

"You saw him outside?"

"Yes!" There was a hint of defiance in the curt answer.

"In Eureka?"

"Yes."

"And both of you saw Andrew there?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Well, what about it all? What's up? What sort of conspiracy have you three entered into? Have I got to dig it out of you word by word?"

"I've not refused to answer your questions," she shot back at him.

"You've answered grudgingly. Precious little help I am to get, eh, unless I force you to it?"

"Force?" She saw that she had angered him and experienced an odd thrill of satisfaction. It was always he who piqued her, himself remaining cool and masterful. It was that sense of mastery which all along heated her blood. She found it positively delicious now to have matters reversed. So she half smiled and appeared only amused. Again he might not know of her inner tenseness.

"Yes, force!" She actually heard the click of his teeth as he angrily bit the word short.

She shrugged.

"Is there anything else, Mr. Glennister?" she inquired.

"A whole lot more. First off, are you the sort to go back on a deal? To break your word to follow an advantage? I

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suppose so; I am inclined to think that most women are."

"I'm not surprised; I think that the kind of women you would know, would be that sort."

"What kind are you? The sort to keep faith? Or the double crossing variety, like the others I know?" he demanded.

"I'll keep my promise. To the letter, as you said."

He sat back, clasped his hands about a lifted knee and drilled her with the steadiest, keenest eyes she had ever seen.

"You saw Andrew. Merely socially or upon any kind of business in any way, even remotely, connected with the place here?" he demanded.

What little advantage she had felt to have was gone in a flash. She hesitated before answering and in her hesitation, brief though it was, saw how the hint of a sneer touched his lips.

"I did have a business understanding with Andrew," she blurted out. "It was that, in case you failed to make your payments, I was to have an option myself!"

"Whew!" He stared, first incredulous, then vastly puzzled. "You? Then, by glory," he burst out, "you and old Jennifer have already put things together? You already think that you know where the gold is?"

"No, I have no more idea where it is now than I ever had."

"You think that you can find it, though?" he questioned.

"I hope that I can. I am going to try," was her reply.

"And should you succeed, you'd hardly come rushing to me with the glad tidings!"

"I shall hardly hope to find it within the next three days," she told him.

"And after that, you're free! Free to make it a three-cornered scrap!"

He settled back to stare at her again.

"Let me see! This determination on your part to get in the game came late, and then with a rush. It took you all the way out to Eureka. I wonder what caused it? It began, didn't it, with the break Norcross made? When he showed you his gold?"

The question was too direct to allow of evasion. So she said, "Yes."

"You naturally talked the whole thing out with Jennifer?"

"Yes."

"You went into the fact that Norcross stated definitely when he made his find?"

"Yes," Glee repeated again.

"Confound it!" cried Glennister. "You'd evade it, if you could, and you can't, so you just say 'yes' or 'no.' A lot of help I am getting."

"I only promised to answer. I didn't promise to help beyond that."

"Did you see Norcross in Eureka?" he continued.

"No."

"How did you know that he was there?"

"Andrew told me."

"What did Norcross want with Andrew? To make sure he got the place, if I defaulted?"

"Yes."

She nettled him with that cool "yes" of hers. And she knew it and took joy from the fact.

"You were to be decent to me; that was in the bargain. Is this what you call being decent to a fellow?" he demanded.

"Yes."

He was on his feet in a flash, now. She, too, sprang up, terrified. For, from the look blazing in his eyes, she thought that in another second she was going to experience the feel of his hands on her.

"Am I to have all my plans knocked into a cocked hat just because you've got some crazy idea that you can cut in on this thing? You, a little goose of a country kid, buying chips in a game where two men like Jet Norcross and

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me have got our knives out for each other! You'd make me laugh, if you didn't make me so confounded mad that I'd like to shake you," he cried.

She made no reply, for simple enough reasons. First, he took her breath away and she could think of nothing to say. And, when she did begin to breathe again and marked how he stared at her and waited for her to say something, she understood instinctively that silence was the most cutting weapon that she could use with him.

"I've a notion," he resumed when it was clear that she had nothing to say, "that I can come at what I want to know through you. Maybe you don't know now where the gold is; but something has stirred you up over it. If I had a bit more time to corkscrew away at what you're thinking and have been thinking, I'd get at it. You're working on what Norcross blabbed; that Jennifer showed the way and that it was six months ago. I'm right there, eh?" he concluded triumphantly.

As before, she said merely, "Yes."

But then, when he kept on staring at her as though he would drive the penetration of those dark eyes of his down to the bottom of her knowledge and speculation, she added emphatically:

"And after three days I shall answer no questions of any kind."

Glennister sat down, stretched his legs out in front of him, a gesture she remembered and resented, and made his second cigarette. She flashed a sidelong look at him; and, seeing that he appeared deeply interested in the floor, she studied him curiously. He looked cool again, very thoughtful and very determined.

"I sat into this game," he said without looking up, almost like a man communing with himself alone, "to beat Jet Norcross to a big stake. I'm going to do it. You're going to help me. Somehow, between you and Jennifer, you've found a stimulus to go ahead. Given time you hope to come at what we all want to know."

He looked up at her at last; not in the least as a man should look at a girl, but as one may regard some sort of a puzzle.

"You two talked over what Norcross said and all that it implied. Six months ago—Jennifer showing the way. Then you would have said, 'Let's think; let's remember all that happened six months ago.' Am I right?"

She could only answer, "Yes."

He nodded and labored away on his puzzle.

"Of course! You put your heads together. You said that, if Norcross followed Jennifer's lead to the gold, why then you had but to remember between you just what Jennifer was about at that time. That would be the logical thing. Yet girls are never logical, they say! Well, let's find out, feeling our way along. How about it. Am I right again?"

"Yes," she cried out. "Yes; go on. What else?"

"You recalled seeing Norcross six months ago?"

"Yes."

"A few moments only? A whole day?" he persisted.

"Several days. Ten days or two weeks. He was our house guest."

"Fine. Now, to remember backward over half a year and recall each day over a period of a couple of weeks, every remark and every step taken and every look—quite a job, eh? Still you and Jennifer have gone into all that?"

"We reasoned as you do," she said. "We started to go into all that, as you say. But we stopped. We haven't mentioned it in four days. And," she flung at him in full defiance now, "we'll not mention it again in another three days; you may be sure of that, Mr. Glennister! Not until after the week of our bargain is up."

"I've always remarked that the fem-

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inine brain is mechanically beautifully adapted to splitting hairs," observed Glennister. "At this juncture I'd like very much to talk with a man. Sorry as I am to disturb Jennifer's slumbers, I must have a word with him. For, despite your assurance that friend Norcross has gone, you may take it from me that he's back and making somewhat difficult just at present such little trips out as I am making this evening. I can't be dropping in on you every hour of the day, so while I'm here we'll learn what we can."

"Danny is tired out," she expostulated. "It was a long, hard trip; we got back very late."

"I'm sorry," he said dryly, and rapped at the closed door. When there came no answer, he impatiently flung the door open, calling, "Jennifer!"

Still no answer. The lamplight flooded this other small room. There was a bench, a table, a bunk against the far wall; all were empty. The covers were thrown back; perhaps Jennifer had gone to bed but, if so, he was up again and gone.

Glennister closed the door again and turned a pair of very suspicious eyes upon his unwilling hostess.

"I—I didn't know," she said, the picture of confusion, and confusion may be most readily associated with guilt. "He—he said good night more than an hour ago. He certainly must have gone out."

"He must have gone out," Glennister jeered at her.

"But he did not come this way! I did not know. There is the other door, from his room outside," she protested.

"You did not know? You would not have heard him? Or you did not want me to know that you were alone? Afraid of me? Afraid to deny me entrance for fear that I'd come in anyway? Afraid, once I was in, to have me know you were defenseless?"

"I did not know," she repeated.

He took up his rifle and clapped on his hat.

"I'm going. And I'm not coming again."

Sudden relief shone in her eyes. He smiled grimly.

"But you're coming to see me. Both you and Dan Jennifer. Come down to the house to-morrow, prepared not to stay three days only, but thirty. A full month. You are to be my most welcome guests for a full, solid month!"

"Good-night, Mr. Glennister," she said angrily.

"Be sure you come. Why? Because your heart, all the heart God gave you, is in that old home. Because, if you fail to show up before noon, I swear I'll carve my mark on everything on the place. I'll show you, my little miss, just what vandalism can be. Try to play fast and loose with me, would you? Try to beat me out at my own game, eh? Try to cook up a lot of silly schemes with Jennifer, would you?"

"I won't come. Nothing on earth could make me," she stated.

"You'll show up before noon, to visit me a full month. I'll force you to it. Remember, we spoke of force, Miss Dryad? I'll force you to it, working on your love for your home and your fear of what I might do. I'll force you, by offering you a proposition you can't find any way to refuse. At the end of the month, here's the bribe part," he sneered, "I'll give you my interest in the house and every cursed thing in it. Stay away, and to the devil with the house! What do I care for the crazy old barn, anyway? Stay away, and I make a fine mess of all the Hathaway junk that I can hammer out of shape and get going in the fireplaces. I don't care the snap of my fingers for the house or its furnishings and heirlooms; I don't care a snap for the whole ranch! I'm after the gold and Jet Norcross' scalp, and there's no pretty little girl this side the stars who's going to head

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me off. No matter how sweet she makes herself in her nice new dresses and silk stockings!"

"I'd never come!" she said angrily.

"You'll come; you'll stay thirty days; you'll wash dishes and sweep and make beds. You'll cry first, say ten minutes, when I'm gone. You'll swear to go help Norcross break me. You'll storm about. Then you'll remember my double proposition, half bribe and half threat and before noon, you and Dan Jennifer, who, it would seem, has the interesting way of poking about when he's supposed to be asleep! You will be knocking at my door, saying, 'Please let us come in, Mr. Glennister.' "

With a sudden gesture he caught up the lamp and puffed out the flame. She cried out in terror. But he had only gone to the door, opened it with a savage jerk and gone.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

HOW ADOBES ARE MADE

THE word "adobe," used to designate the large sun-dried bricks and tiles made by the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest in building walls and houses, is said to be traceable to an Egyptian hieroglyphic signifying "brick." From this, by way of the Arabic, the Spanish word *adobar,* meaning "to daub or plaster," was derived. The word in its present form was then adopted into the English language as so many other Spanish words current in the Southwest have been.

Before the Spaniards came to America, the Pueblo Indians did not make their adobes in wooden frames. Their method is thus described by the Spanish chronicler, Casteñeda: "They gather a great pile of sagebrush and sedge grass, and set it afire, and when it is half coals and ashes, they throw a quantity of dirt and water on it, and mix it all together. They make round balls of this, which they use instead of stones after they are dry, fixing them with the same mixture which comes to be like a stiff clay."

The Spaniards taught the Indians to use wheat straw instead of charred brush in the making of their adobes. One of the chief requisites of the industry is a good supply of water. The adobe dwellings, therefore, are generally found near streams. The nature of the clay from which adobe bricks and tiles are made is such that the straw is usually the only other constituent needed, besides water, in the process of manufacture. When finished, the adobe is set on edge to dry, in a slightly slanted position, so as to shed rain.

The usual size of the finished adobe is about eighteen inches in length, by eight to ten inches wide, and four to six inches thick. The adobe dwellings of the Southwest last a long time with reasonable attention to repairs. The greatest damage is done by the action of heavy rains at the base of the walls, and by the erosion produced by severe sand storms. The adobe is preserved by the application of plaster made of earth, applied as a rule by the Indian women. The interior walls and sometimes the borders of windows and doors are also whitewashed with gypsum.

Adobe dwellings are well adapted to the climate of the Southwest and are used both by Indians and whites. They are warm in winter and cool in summer, and the material is generally at hand in plentiful quantities, so they have the combined advantages of comfort and cheapness.

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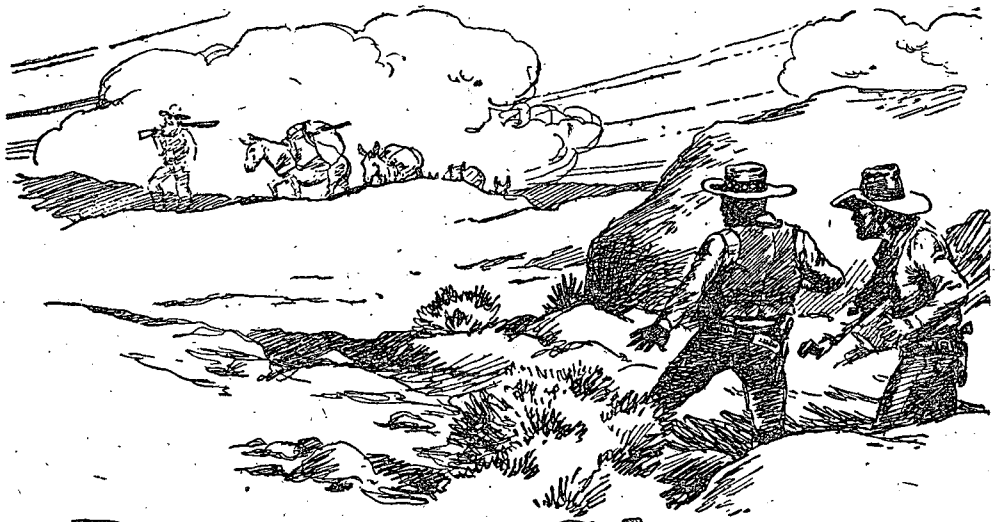

Desert Ghosts

By Frank Triem

Author of "Flaming Impulse," etc.

EVER since Old Sam Bailey first saw the two sinister-faced men approaching he had had a premonition that trouble with a capital T was to be his lot. Sam, a withered little remnant of a prospector, was driving the long train of burros before him on his way back to his mine; but, as the dozen or so shaggy animals glimpsed the oncoming men, they abruptly halted. The miner's thin hands rested on the worn Winchester in his boot; but still he hesitated. He didn't want to make himself look foolish by what might prove to be unnecessary heroics.

"Easy, Hamlet!" he cautioned, as the lead burro up ahead began to move restlessly about, its bell clanging softly. Now the two men were within fifty feet; tensely Old Sam Bailey studied their details. Big men they were, with a curious sallowness that marked them as denizens of a city. He began to wonder what they were doing here.

On they came; the distance separating them from him was reduced to thirty feet, then twenty. Next moment, as Bailey opened his lips to drawl a greeting, he went suddenly rigid; for simultaneously they had reached up under their coats. And now he found himself covered by a brace of automatic pistols. The two were grinning at him, he saw, grins that were devoid of all mirth.

"Well, well, if it isn't Santa Claus!" one of them jeered. "And just when we was looking for some one like that, too. You're just in time to help a couple of tenderfeet out!"

Again they laughed; then, at a sharp command, Sam Bailey raised his hands above his head. His face was expressionless, but his eyes had begun to glow dully. The two had advanced upon him and now one of them reholstered his gun. Before the old man could make a move to protect himself, the fellow had struck him a heavy blow with his fist just back of the ear. Bailey felt

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the world spinning about him in crazy circles; then he was lying in the sand, staring up at his enemies.

But although he wasn't much larger than a bantam he had a great deal of grit in his make-up. For just a moment he lay there trying to collect his scattered wits; then, with a shrill yell, Bailey leaped to his feet. Fists flailing, he hurled himself at the one who had struck him.

Dimly he heard his tormentors laugh. One of them seized his arms from behind. Through a red mist he saw the other poise before him, saw a big fist draw back; then there was a resounding crack, followed by unconsciousness!

When he came to, he was alone. Gone were his dozen burros, with their heavy packs of supplies and water; gone the two ruffians. And, when he finally staggered to his feet and glanced about him, Sam saw that even the tracks were gone, having been obliterated by a steady wind. Save for the mesquite and cacti and a blizzard circling far above, the old miner was alone.

There was a smoke tree a few yards away and Sam Bailey presently staggered across and flung himself down in its shade. The day was blazing hot, and his head ached dully from the effect of the blow. Moreover, he found suddenly that he was thirsty. Sam shook his head grimly at that, for he knew that it was extremely unlikely that he would ever drink again.

Although the two had despoiled him of everything they could lay hands on, he soon discovered that they had overlooked his old pipe and sack of tobacco. This cheered the miner immensely for, if he was going to die, he meant to smoke all he wanted to for once. He stuffed the charred bowl full of the rough-cut and applied a match. At once things began to look brighter.

"If I was one of them there critters," he mused, eying some rock lizards that lay basking in the infernal heat, "I wouldn't have to bother none about water. Any time within the next few years would do, an' I reckon I could go without a drink permanent, if I had to. But," he sighed lugubriously, "I ain't, an' I can't. An' so the question is, what am I going to do?"

This, indeed, was the question. Obviously he had two options: either he could stay here, and die of thirst and starvation; or he could try to walk to the nearest spring, some thirty miles away and, in all probability, die of thirst and starvation.

It would be far easier to lie here and wait for the end, he realized grimly; but somehow he couldn't do it. The desert had taught him to fight as long as breath lasted, and now he must live up to his philosophy.

So, at last, he got to his feet and stood staring out into the desolate waste before him. It didn't take that one brief skyward glance to convince him that the buzzard was still circling. The scavenger was playing his part, just as the miner was; and, although he knew how it must end, Old Sam felt no particular anger against the bird. It was all in the game.

Then he was walking. He had taken his bearings carefully, although that was hardly necessary; all his life he had lived on the desert so that he knew it as the average person knows his own back yard. Thirty miles of desolation and heat separated him from the nearest spring, but he could almost have found his way there blindfolded. Even after he reached water starvation would still face him; but it was far preferable to death by thirst. And there was always one chance in a million that some other dweller of the desert, coming for water, might rescue him.

It had been late morning when he encountered the two bad men and, as he abandoned the friendly smoke tree, he estimated that it must be approximately noon. If he made it at all, he

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could expect to arrive at the spring somewhere toward evening of the next day. That was a mighty big "if" he told himself grimly.

An hour passed, and another. Brown against the burning blue of the sky, the mountains hung upon the far horizon. About him, as far as the eye could see was an unbroken expanse of desert, dotted with mesquite and sage and an occasional saguaro cactus.

The heat grew until somewhere in mid-afternoon it reached a mighty climax. He might have been facing the open door of a furnace; strong and inured to hardships as he was, Old Sam Bailey found himself staggering. His lips were dry and his tongue burned; he was panting for breath.

Another hour passed. The sun was slanting down into the west and now the heat began slowly to abate. Ages later the sun was gone and, with the first deepening hue of night, came a touch of wind. It was cool and welcome. Sam knew, however, that before morning it would be bitterly cold.

With dusk he flung himself down upon the sand under a smoke tree, not caring particularly whether he landed on a snake or not. After a time he recovered sufficiently to gather wood and light a fire. He had nothing to cook, but the blaze was company; and there was one chance in a million that some one might see it from afar and investigate.

But no one did. His sleep that night was uneasy and troubled with malignant dreams, so that when with the first gray light he staggered to his feet he felt even more weary than he had the previous night. For the first time, he had an inner conviction that he was not going to reach the spring.

That feeling grew upon Old Sam as, through an apparently interminable morning, he groped on across the desert. By noon he found himself croaking snatches of forgotten songs; looking back, the miner saw that his trail zigzagged in an ominous manner. He knew what that meant.

Another hour, and another. The day was at its hottest; and now the mirage was about him. On every hand he saw tree-lined streams or placid, sky-blue waters; the tinkle of a fall came to his ears. With his last ounce of strength Bailey fought against these lures; but an hour later he was crawling on his hands and knees toward a silvery brook. This was the beginning of the end.

He reached the bank of the stream and it faded from his view. He was lying on the parched earth while the sun dropped into the west. Night, his last night, was closing down.

A flicker of sanity returned to him with the first touch of evening; and, with a great effort, he dragged himself half a dozen paces to the shelter of a scrawny mesquite. He lay beneath its limbs, watching the sky in the west deepen. A great star glowed, low on the horizon, an evening star.

Behind him sounded the tinkling of a bell accompanied by muffled steps! With a feeble cry, he turned. He didn't know what awful thing he expected to see; but the object that greeted his eyes brought him sitting up. Standing watching him solemnly was a burro, and now once more he caught the clang of its bell. His lead burro, Hamlet, stood before him. A length of rope terminating in a short stake showed how the animal had made his escape.

That marked the turning point in his great adventure. Somehow or other he managed to haul himself onto Hamlet's back, and guide the beast across the moonlit desert toward the spring. When, hours later, he tumbled to earth the murmur of water was no delusion. Hamlet had saved his life.

It took all the will-power that Bailey possessed to keep from gulping a gallon of the divine liquid, but he knew that that would mean death. So he

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drank only a few swallows at a time. Bit by bit, his strength began to return to him. Some time around midnight he hobbled Hamlet's slim legs, using some of the rope with which the two men had staked the animal; he lighted a tiny fire, and then slept.

When next Sam Bailey awoke, it was morning. Sitting up, the old man realized that he was wonderfully refreshed. He took another long drink from the spring, and then for the first time became aware of a burning hunger. He had not eaten since that eventful morning when the two robbers had robbed and beaten him. Forty-eight hours without food!

Sam Bailey eyed the plump Hamlet reflectively; but, famished as he was, he couldn't forget that the burro had saved his life. And even if he did decide to have a steak off the animal, he had not so much as a pocketknife with which to remove it.

Then, for the first time, the idea of pursuing his despoilers occurred to Old Sam. He got to his feet and stood staring speculatively at Hamlet. The wind had obliterated their tracks, half an hour after they made them; moreover, the starting point had been approximately thirty miles away. But now as he peered at Hamlet, his glance became suddenly fixed and purposeful; a grim smile twitched the corners of his lips.

"I'd shore get hongry," he murmured. "Yeah, but I will anyways. I reckon it's worth trying!"

And while the worthy Mr. Bailey was dividing his time between wishing that he had something to eat and wishing that he could arrange a return engagement with the two bad men, those individuals were making the best of their way toward Mexico. "Slim" Morgan and "Slippery" Slade had entered the great desert approximately two jumps ahead of the police; but, with the lucky capture of the burros with their packs of provisions, water and ammunition, it began to look as if they would make good their escape. In spite of their inexperience, they made fairly good time all that day following their encounter with Bailey. And, when that night they camped down in a brush-flanked arroyo, they felt that they were almost out of danger. Moreover, with the acquisition of the miner's Winchester and ample supply of cartridges, they were prepared to cope with any force that they were likely to meet. It wouldn't be the first time that Morgan and Slade had killed; nor had they always done so in self-defense.

They had a good deal of trouble with the burros, that first day; the animals at once sensed the fact that inexperienced hands ruled them, and promptly undertook to play horse. They stopped frequently and on no provocation whatever; and each time it took much frantic action on the part of the two yeggs to get them in motion again. The leader of the animals, the belled burro, was particularly diabolical; he assayed side excursions and alarums that kept the outlaws in a constant state of turmoil. Once Slippery Slade, the older of the two men, hauled out his automatic and with an oath swung it up. His close-set and slightly crossed eyes gleamed malevolently as he squeezed the grip-safety; his flabby face was set in a mask of hatred.

Before he could pull the trigger Slim Morgan, a rather undernourished-looking youth, knocked the gun out of line.

"Don't shoot him, you fool!" snapped the worthy Slim. "Want to leave his carcass for folks to tell that we went this way by?"

Slippery scratched one ear meditatively, then reholstered the gun.

"All right," he growled at last. "But when we get across the border I'll barbecue him!"

Thus it was that Hamlet was still

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among the living that night. Morgan and Slade found several large coils of rope among the miner's packs; these they cut into equal lengths, whittled some stakes, and undertook to fasten the burros. When with streams of profanity they had accomplished this, Morgan and his companion were willing to call it a day.

They kindled a small fire over which they boiled a pot of coffee and heated several tins of beans. The meal finished, they divided the captured blankets and lay down. The moon swinging above the horizon found them sound asleep.

It was Slippery Slade who awoke, several hours later, to a sudden conviction that something was radically wrong. The moon was high; its yellow light cast a series of irregular patches upon the ground and made the mesquite lining the arroyo look like giant, watchful spiders. A wind whispered through the underbrush, now fanning the dying fire to a ruddy glow, now letting it fade to a mass of blue-gray ash out of which only a few red coals winked sleepily. Down the arroyo, something was moving softly about.

Gun in hand, Slade sat up. For an instant, his heart seemed to stand still as he perceived those clustered, luminous eyes; a moment later he remembered. The burros, of course.

Then he began to find something ominous in the stealthy movements of the beasts. With a growl and a shake he aroused Slim Morgan, and the two got to their feet.

A profane imprecation escaped Morgan's lips as they approached the burros. His keener eyesight told him that several of the beasts had pulled their stakes. Apparently another five minutes and the whole outfit would have departed.

There followed a thrilling and industrious quarter of an hour, at the end of which time they had more or less hobbled the animals. It was then that they discovered that the belled burro, ringleader of the band, had departed. So far as Morgan and Slade could see, the desert was devoid of all living things and Hamlet had made good his escape.

"Well, I'm glad he's gone!" grunted the pasty-faced younger man. "He made more trouble than he was worth."

"Sure," grunted Slade. "Only thing is, I'd like to have shot him. No use worrying over that now, though. I'm going back to bed."

When they awoke next morning they found that only one burro was gone; and after an hour spent in untangling the beasts from the ropes, and subsequent clumsy attempts to apply the big packsaddles, they were at last ready to go on.

The eleven animals started out meekly enough, but before they had gone far the deviltry of the previous day was recommenced. The absence of the belled burro made them even more difficult to handle. And there were periods when Slade and Morgan had all that they could do to keep the long string in motion at all. The stiffness resulting from the previous day's exercise did nothing to aid their tempers. By noon Morgan and Slade had cursed themselves into silence.

The war continued all through the long afternoon; and night found them, exhausted, a scant twelve miles from where they had started out that morning. Both men were gloomy, Slim Morgan especially so.

"Those gray devils are going to be harder to handle," he prophesied. "They're going to make real trouble for us before we're through with them, I can feel it in my bones!"

And the next few days showed clearly that Slim's bones were to be depended upon. The eleven burros might have been so many malignant devils in disguise, and they had more tricks than the two yeggs would have believed pos-

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sible. Morgan and Slade became thin and hollow-eyed; at night, they slept like dead men.

Then came an evening, several nights after their loss of the belled burro, when Slim Morgan glanced back and thought that he saw some one following them far behind. He imparted his information to the sullen-faced Slade; the two turned in their saddles and scowled. The desert was level as the top of a table but, although Slim pointed out the thing that had attracted his attention, Slippery was unable to see it. He said so and made several unkind suggestions about Slim's eyesight.

When they camped down for the night, however, Slippery examined the captured Winchester carefully and ended by thrusting a last cartridge into the chamber. After supper he turned his somber regard upon the younger man.

"Seeing as your eyes are so much better than mine, you can stand guard up to midnight!" he growled. "I think your skull is stuffed with tamales, myself, but we can't afford to take chances. I'll watch from twelve o'clock on."

Slim Morgan eyed him mutinously, Slade perceived. His hand stole up under his coat.

"All right," agreed the youth. "Anything you say goes."

He took out a paper of cigarettes, seated himself with his back to the piled packsaddles, and prepared for the vigil. After eying him furtively once or twice, Slippery Slade betook himself to his blankets.

The desert was very still the older crook realized as he half closed his eyes. There was a brooding hush that suggested an impending calamity; with an effort he fought the spell off. The moonlight, the stars, the shadowy smoke tree above them, blended, grew misty, unreal. A few minutes later he was asleep.

Slippery awoke and lay motionless staring into the night sky. The stars had shifted, and the moon was in the west. Obviously he had slept many hours. Slim was to have awakened him at midnight, he remembered. Surely it was past that hour now. The silence pressed in on him like a living, tangible thing. With overwhelming force the uneasiness with which he had gone to sleep returned. Something was wrong, he told himself.

Then he sat up, his gun in his trembling hands. The fire had burned low, but in its feeble red glow he could see the form of Slim Morgan, lying beside the packs. Slim's mouth was open and sounds indicative of intense slumber wafted from it.

"Wake up, you lazy whelp!" Slippery roared as he sprang to his feet. "What's the big idea, anyway?"

Morgan twitched, yawned, and opened his eyes. Then, as the pasty youth saw the menace in the older man's slightly crossed optics, he too got to his feet.

Next moment the silence was broken in a dramatic manner. Both men jumped and forgot their grievance; clearly upon the still night air, coming apparently from miles away, they heard the jubilant "He-haw!" of a burro.

Simultaneously Morgan and Slade whirled, staring down the arroyo. The place where they had tied the burros was vacant! Slade said something under his breath and strode down into the gloom. Morgan was at his heels.

The burros were gone; not a doubt of that. The two men had staked them securely, and even now the stakes still protruded from the ground. Something very strange had happened.

Slade dropped to his knees beside one of the stakes and drew the trailing end of the rope to him. Even in the yellow glow of the moon both men could see that it had been deliberately untied by human hands!

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For just an instant, Slade and Morgan glared at each other, then slowly Slade's hand crept up under his coat. The youth laughed.

"Try it if you like, Slippery," he jeered. "Remember who it was that potted Corporal Stanley, when the rest of you bums was scared stiff to tackle him? Sure you do, but don't let that hinder you. Just go right ahead!"

Slade's somber face twitched and, for another moment, both men eyed each other watchfully. Then, with a grunt of rage and defeat, the older crook suddenly turned and strode back to camp.

Despite the gravity of the position in which they found themselves, Morgan and Slade slept the sleep of utter exhaustion until the rising sun awakened them. Tacitly they refrained from discussing the escape of the burros; the animals were gone, and there was nothing for it but to go on on foot.

"I told you that I saw some one following us," Morgan mumbled, "but you wouldn't listen."

"Well, you was to stand guard till midnight!" growled Slade. "But you went to sleep. What are you beefing about?"

Both men were silent for a time. At length they fell to discussing their immediate plans. Slim Morgan eyed the piles of supplies gloomily.

"We can't take all this stuff," said he. "Have to cache what we can't carry, I guess. We'll each take a big canteen and a pack of eats."

Slim had read somewhere that a cache was constructed by digging a gravelike depression, lining it with brush and stowing inside the goods to be left. After a great deal of labor and profanity the task was finished. Morgan piled in more branches, cut from the mesquite trees perched on the edge of the arroyo, and afterward the two crooks shoveled the dirt back into place.

The sun was high in the east when they picked up their packs and canteens and swung off toward the south. Both men were very silent; instinctively they knew that what lay behind them was as nothing to what lay ahead. All about them, desolate and barren of life as far as the eye could see, extended the desert. Off to their left half a mile or so was the shadowy outline of the arroyo, clearly traced by the mesquites and smoke trees lining its banks.

It was Slim who a long time later broke the silence.

"I'm betting that the fellow we saw was the old hick we took the outfit from," said he. "And he sneaked into camp and untied the burros, knowing that they'd beat it. I had a hunch when we first met up with him that we'd ought to have killed him."

"You're wormy!" snorted Slippery. "That fellow's dead, long before this. A man can't go many days without food and eats in this country."

Again a gloomy silence pressed down upon them, while they tramped steadily toward the south.

When finally evening descended they could go not a step farther. Every muscle, every tendon ached, but apparently they were no nearer the indistinct mountains toward which they were headed. Already their canteens were half empty, and they had seen no sign of water.

As they made camp for the night, Slippery saw his younger companion staring long and earnestly into the sunset.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "Getting to be one of these nature-lovers, hey?"

Morgan glanced at him, his thin, white face twitching.

"I'm getting our line of march, so we won't be lost if we have to turn back!" said he simply.

That silenced Slade. The two yeggs made a brief supper, took a drink apiece

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from their canteens, and crawled into their blankets.

The next morning was a repetition of the previous one; but with afternoon it became apparent that unless they discovered water at once they would have to turn back. As the sun dropped into the west, the two crooks scanned the desert with bloodshot eyes; but it was in vain. No sign of moisture did they see and, when they camped, they both knew that a crisis was before them. If they went on until the last of their water was gone, it would be impossible to return to the cache. And, if they started back now, the toil of the last two days would have been useless.

Slim Morgan stood with drooping shoulders watching while the sun dipped lower and yet lower toward the horizon. At last it began to slide from view, and soon after it was gone. Another night was upon them.

He turned to find Slippery Slade's close-set and slightly crossed eyes focused upon his face.

"Well?" sneered the older man.

Morgan shrugged.

"You can do as you please," said he, "but I'm starting back to-morrow morning."

Thus it was that the rising sun found the bandits headed back the way they had come. Slim Morgan tramped gloomily along in the lead, and Slippery Slade followed. They seldom spoke, and never eyed each other directly. There was a growing antagonism between them that threatened to blossom into active conflict. When that time came, one of the two would go on, the other would stay where he fell.

The two days it took them to return to the cache seemed an eternity of blazing heat and burning thirst. They emptied their canteens the first day, so that on the second they had nothing to drink. There were several tins of sardines remaining; but neither dared eat for fear it would make his thirst unbearable. The first night found them gaunt and hollow-eyed, with blackened lips that spoke eloquently of drouth. And for a time next day it seemed as if they could not continue. Only the fear of death kept Morgan and Slade in motion that second afternoon. But eventually there came a moment when, as the sun dropped into the west, Slim knew that another mile would see them to their destination.

On he staggered; behind him he could hear Slade limping along. The sun sank, and far off he could see the arroyo where they had camped that fatal night. Now the intervening space was reduced to a half mile, now to a quarter. The stars began to glow, and from some great distance came the howl of a coyote.

The dusk was thickening into blackness when Morgan thrust his way through the heavy undergrowth and came to the margin of the arroyo. Scrambling to the floor he started up the cleft. Around a bend he went; now he found himself crossing the spot where they had staked the burros.

An incredulous cry broke from him, and he began to run. A glance told the young crook what had happened. The place where they had so carefully buried the supplies was now a gaping hole; a shovel lay close by. The cache was empty.

Then, warned by a snarling grunt of rage, Slim whirled. Through a daze he saw Slippery's hand dart up under his coat. Entirely without conscious direction Morgan's fist went out. Next instant Slade lay twitching on the earth, while Slim asked himself why he hadn't used his gun.

He was still debating the question dully when Slippery Slade moaned and sat up. The two crooks stared through hate-narrowed eyes at each other; for the present, however, the show-down was averted.

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That night, instead of the surplus of food and water they had expected to have, there was none. Slim Morgan kept a watchful eye upon his companion, but apparently Slade had gone into a daze. The older crook sat beside the empty cache, staring blankly down into it.

That night seemed to last all eternity. Both men were exhausted from their long trek. Hunger and thirst and the great disappointment had added the finishing touches to their defeat by the desert. Slim slept fitfully, his brief periods of unconsciousness rendered hideous by nightmares. It was a positive relief to see the gray dawn lighten in the east.

With morning came another crisis. They must do something; death was not far away. Yet what was there to do, except try to find water? Slim Morgan, turning the problem over in his fevered brain, perceived that there could be but one end to their adventure, no matter what they did. He had seen enough of the desert to know that finding water would be a miracle.

Nevertheless he decided to make the attempt. He told Slippery of his determination, and the older man nodded.

"I'm with you," said he savagely. "And believe me, kid, if you don't find water——"

He said no more, but there was a world of meaning conveyed in his tone.

So, with sunrise, the two bandits started out on the quest that could end only one way. The empty canteens they abandoned as useless; the half dozen tins of sardines they stowed away in various pockets.

Silently Slim Morgan climbed from the arroyo and set out toward the north. Behind him, Slippery Slade cursed long and savagely before following. That was one of the basic differences between the two. Morgan took his medicine, no matter how bitter, without railing at fate; but Slade became vociferous when in trouble.

One hour passed, and the sun grew hot. Both men perspired; their feet were blistered; their muscles ached. Morgan perceived that this day would either make or break them, figuratively speaking. If they didn't find water before night, they never would.

And then, for the first time, they saw the ghost cavalcade.

Across a ridge half a mile or so distant moved a long string of heavily laden burros; and, mounted on another animal, at the end of the line, rode a man. The heat waves that danced from the desert made the outfit vague and unreal. Morgan and Slade, halting, could hear absolutely no sound. With the silence of wraiths, the procession passed across the ridge and disappeared.

The silence was broken by a low cry from Slippery Slade. The younger man turned and eyed his companion closely.

"It's—it's his ghost!" Slippery gasped. "The old man and his burros—ghosts, all of 'em!"

Morgan laughed a mirthless laugh.

"Ghosts my eye!" he snarled. "Did you ever hear of burro-ghosts? It's him, right enough, come on!"

Somewhere a reserve of strength had been released in his system, and the young bandit headed toward the ridge at a staggering run. Glancing back, he saw his companion wavering along. Slade's face was a ghastly gray and he made queer, sobbing noises.

Slim Morgan ran on. The blood was pounding in his ears and a gray mist swam before his vision. He was putting everything he had into this last mad effort. But if he could once get within range of the burro-train! His fingers closed over the butt of his automatic and he jerked the weapon out.

He tripped once or twice, then he

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hit the foot of the low ascent. His heartbeats came too fast for him to count, now, and every vein and artery in his head and throat seemed expanded to the bursting point.

A hot wind was blowing in his face as he gained the top of the ridge. He halted, staring unseeingly into the tangle of arroyos and cañons below him. The phantom caravan had gone. Not a living thing was to be seen.

Slowly he surveyed the earth about him. It was composed largely of sand, and the hot wind would have obliterated any tracks almost as soon as they were made. But down among those ravines and hillocks, he was sure the old miner and his burros were concealed.

"Ghosts I told you!" he mumbled.

At the sound of that croaking voice, Morgan whirled. It was only his companion, but Slade's face was livid and inhuman. Obviously he considered this proof of the correctness of his assertion. Morgan's eyes began to glow, and his lips drew back from his teeth in a tigerish snarl.

"Ghosts nothing!" he rasped. "They're down there, I tell you!"

He waved vaguely toward the maze below them, then began to stagger down the slope. Now that his first excitement was past he felt sick and very, very weak.

In the ensuing hour Slim Morgan drove himself up ravines and down twisted arroyos; he explored little, dusty valleys and mesas. At the end of that time, he had found no sign of the ghost cavalcade. But, when presently he halted for Slippery to come limping up, he became aware of an ominous circumstance. Briefly, he was lost.

They were standing in a small valley, staring at each other. Slade was gray with exhaustion and excitement; his cheek bones protruded like those of an Asiatic, and he quivered as if cold. Morgan knew that he himself must present a shocking appearance. Now as he faced his companion he saw that something was about to happen.

Slade came up and halted, a scant five feet distant. His lips trembled and words quivered on his tongue. Then suddenly he went a shade grayer, raised one hand and pointed at something behind Morgan. The youth laughed but did not turn.

"That's an old one!" he jeered. "Shoot me in the back, would you?"

His words came to a stumbling halt as he saw that real fear was in his partner's close-set eyes. Watchfully he half turned his head.

There on the rim of the valley, a scant two hundred yards away, moved the phantom burro-train. Clearly they could distinguish the eleven heavily laden beasts, the bearded little old man who drove them from the back of a twelfth. And this time the breeze carried to their ears the soft chiming of a bell.

"It's the ghosts!" babbled Slippery wildly.

"Did you ever *hear* ghosts?" cried Slim Morgan. "It's them, I tell you —they're real!"

Again he glanced over his shoulder. The outfit had disappeared and save for a circling buzzard no living thing was visible.

Warned by a slight rustling, Slim Morgan whirled back toward his companion. The light of madness glowed in Slade's close-set eyes; his hand under his coat was moving up toward the shoulder holster.

It all seemed like some awful dream to the younger bandit as he hurled himself on Slade. The other's gun came out, but before he could fire Morgan had knocked it flying. They went to earth in a flailing tangle of arms and legs.

Although Morgan fought like a tiger, hidden wells of strength seemed to have been unleashed in his companion and Slippery evaded his clawing hands and

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somehow tripped him. The older man was seated astride Slim's chest, his fingers closing down on his windpipe. One flashing question came to Morgan; why hadn't he used his gun? Even with Slade's hand already on his weapon, the younger man knew he could have beat him to the punch. Now it was too late.

Black specks danced before his eyes; his lungs were on fire for want of air. His struggles grew weaker, and he could hear the blood singing through his head.

At the last moment that strangling pressure ceased. Even before he heard his companion's gurgling cry, his ears caught the tinkle of a bell. The ground quivered under approaching footsteps.

Slippery Slade had staggered to his feet. Morgan raised himself on one elbow and twisted his head. Not twenty paces away the burro-train had come to a halt and the old miner, looking infinitely real and infinitely triumphant, was riding toward them.

Morgan's glance shifted to Slade. With a choking cry the older bandit had stooped and recovered the pistol. He jerked the weapon into line.

But the man on the burro snapped a rifle to his shoulder. The bang of Slade's automatic was lost in the whip-crack of a .30-30, and the outlaw crumpled silently to earth.

After Old Sam Bailey had bound his two prisoners hand and foot, he filled his pipe, lighted it, and then carefully explained to Morgan just what had happened.

"A'course, the drifting sand had hid yore tracks complete!" he drawled. "After Hamlet come an' give me a lift to the spring I hurried back to whar I had last seen you; it was no use. But thar was another way."

He halted to stare meditatively at Hamlet, who returned his glance with solemn eyes. At length he resumed, "When a burro busts loose from some bird what has grabbed him onlawful-like, he most gin'ally starts fer home. He don't bother about whar his right-ful boss is, ner nothin' like that; it's the old pasture he's lookin' fer. So when Hamlet run acrost me, I knowed I was between you fellers and town, almost in a straight line. That give me my direction, an' I started out to find you. Before I got through I was mighty hongry, but that don't matter now. When finally I come up with you, I see how I could get holt of the burros. I sneaked in an untied 'em, as you know, an' they followed me an' Hamlet away. I figured then you'd have to go on on foot. An' when you cached the stuff an' started out, I cantered in an' grabbed the food an' water. After that, you was my meat!"

PROSPECTORS OPPOSE BONDING LAW

IN the regions of California where men go out into the hills and deserts prospecting for gold, some little inconvenience and hardship is caused by the State law which requires the licensing and bonding of all those who are engaged in the business of buying raw gold. In the isolated mining districts, small stamp-mill operators, prospectors, and owners of little stores have been bringing all possible influence to bear to have this law repealed. They claim that the law prevents the small miner from purchasing groceries and other needed supplies, paying in gold dust or nuggets, the most convenient medium of barter and trade for him. It is also urged that the law prevents the operator of a small stamp mill from accepting ore from neighboring prospectors. It therefore serves to cramp the business activities of the men who go out to seek gold as well as of those with whom they trade.

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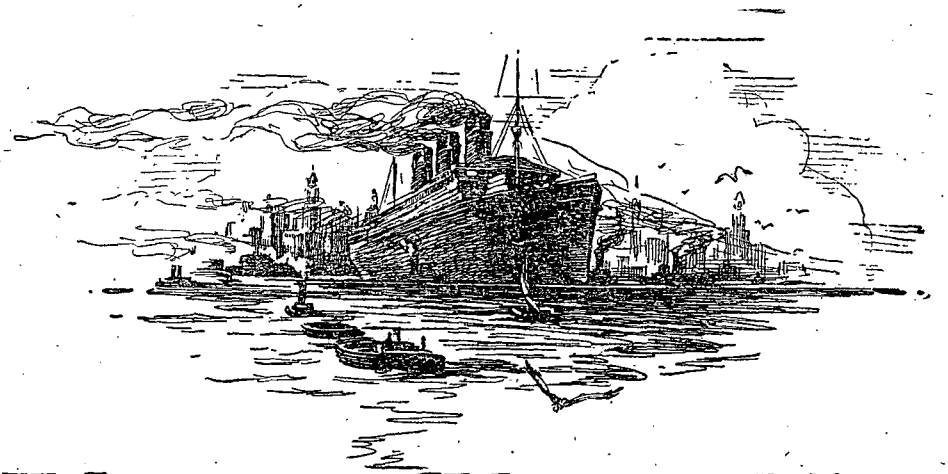

Winners of Western Millions (Smelter Magnates)

By **Edward H. Smith**

Author of "Haggin, the Mysterious Turk," etc.

GUGGENHEIM, the street hawker and lace merchant of Philadelphia, had a customer who could not pay. Rather than press his man he took what, by all signs, portents and experiences, is the most hopeless of human securities, an option on an unseen mine. But, as a result of this, the dynasty that he founded controls a fortune whose tentacles reach from Denver to Alaska in the farthest Northwest, to Chile in South America and to Perth Amboy in the East. His sons are virtual arbiters of the destinies of men wherever ore is dug from the ground.

From a peddler of stove polish to smelter king is a journey of an obliquity that is extraordinary even for America. And where this tenacious little man got the versatility that equipped him for such a conversion does not appear on the record. He was born at Langenau in Switzerland in 1828. Previous to the nineteenth century, his family had lived for some three hundred years in Baden, a funny, little "health" resort in the mountains where the good burghers of Zurich go every summer. Meyer Guggenheim's father had no money to give him any schooling, let alone send him to one of the excellent Swiss universities. The boy emigrated to America when he was nineteen.

The voyage was a stormy one and, according to report, took four months, —a long trip even for a sailing vessel. At any rate, it gave him ample time to become pretty thoroughly acquainted with an attractive fellow passenger of about his own age, named Barbara Meyers. Propinquity at sea for one week has been known to be quite enough to bring about an engagement. What would have been unusual with most people but was not unusual in the case of Meyer Guggenheim was that the engagement stuck.

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He landed without money and without prospects; furthermore, without the slightest knowledge of the new language that he must master, if he hoped to keep life in his body. While the Jews do not discourage love in a cottage, they do insist that the cottage shall be there, with a roof and four walls and the wherewithal to keep the larder door from gaping. So this ship-made betrothal began under auspices that were not of the brightest, and the relatives on both sides were none too enthusiastic.

Guggenheim landed in Philadelphia. Besides having no money and no English he had no trade. But this young immigrant got himself a pack and a supply of stove polish with which he went trudging from village to village, town to town, and house to house in the country districts of northeastern Pennsylvania. At first, he gravitated naturally to the regions inhabited by the Pennsylvania Dutch, whose Rheno-Franconian dialect was not so vastly different from the patois of his native German Switzerland. He now began to develop another quality that was to grow with practice and show a value beyond all others, an infinite capacity for learning.

In Bethlehem, at the house where he had lodging, he encountered a young chemist from Zurich. Meyer Guggenheim never met a man without trying to extract from him all the information he would yield that might prove useful. So he pumped his fellow lodger until he found out what the stove polish was made of. It was, he quickly discovered, no sacred mystery, the ingredients were easily procurable, and he could mix the stuff himself at a cost that was only fifteen per cent of the selling price. From that day, the manufacturers lost a customer. Guggenheim spent his evenings making the concoction and his days selling it. His profits were five times what they had been. He added a line of glue to his stock in trade, had it analyzed, and repeated the procedure.

At this pace, it was not long before he had a steady livelihood and more. He married Barbara Meyers, who bore him eight sons and three daughters. One of the boys died in infancy, the others lived to form a combination that proved irresistible in the field that was allotted to them, the solid team of Meyer Guggenheim and his seven sons.

The useful, prosaic stove polish and glue were so profitable that our Jewish magnate was soon able to add other things to his pack. He observed that the women, who bought his ugly but utilitarian wares, were much more approachable with things that adorned their persons. Embroideries, laces and the like were first a side line and subsequently the main staple of his merchandise. His birthplace at Langenau was the center of the Swiss lace-making industry; so he was now dealing in a product not so foreign to his native ken.

In fact, he was able to lay aside his pack and leave itinerant hawking to younger and newer immigrants. He took a partner and started the firm of Guggenheim & Pulaski, embroidery merchants, in Philadelphia. Guggenheim & Pulaski branched out into the wholesale business. Such travel, as its head found necessary, was to sell to merchants and not for house-to-house canvassing. As his sons grew up, Guggenheim groomed each one of them carefully for a special function. Isaac became a commercial trader for the house. Daniel was sent to Switzerland to study the manufacture of the embroideries they dealt in and to serve as buyer. By the time Solomon was adolescent, his father was prosperous enough to send him to Zurich for his education.

The partnership of Guggenheim & Pulaski was dissolved in 1881. In its

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place, there appeared the firm of M. Guggenheim's Sons. Not, mark you, M. Guggenheim & Sons. For the proverbial pride of a Jewish father in each male child was intensified in this fervent little Swiss of the wiry whiskers. He boasted, at this time, that he would give them a million apiece before he was finished. They were known in Philadelphia as the "whale-born."

And, for my part, I have not the faintest doubt that Meyer Guggenheim would have made good his boast, if he had never seen Colorado. He had established a branch in New York; he had developed the business of importing on a large scale; he had customers from coast to coast, when the emergency arose that diverted his insatiable mind into a field very remote from the lace business.

A dry-goods merchant in Leadville, Colorado, formerly California Gulch, went broke. Everybody in the camps, no matter what his normal and sensible vocation, took an occasional flyer in mining. This insolvent owed M. Guggenheim's Sons a large bill. His only asset was a five-thousand-dollar option on the A. Y. & Minnie claims. Now young Benjamin Guggenheim had been sent to Columbia University and there studied, among other courses, metallurgy and geology. Here, thought the father, was a good opening for Benny. He took over his debtor's option. To do him justice, he did not grab it entirely, but wrote himself in as a partner on equal terms, putting up the cash necessary to consummate the purchase. And he sent Benny out to Leadville to investigate his unseen acquisition.

The reports that Benny sent back were not encouraging. To be sure, the A. Y. & Minnie was unquestionably a mine. Ore came from its recesses that contained valuable minerals. But it was flooded and the water prevented the proper extraction of the potential wealth.

Meyer Guggenheim climbed on a train and went West. He was now fifty-nine years old, but his zest for learning everything that he could, had not abated a jot since the day he discovered that he could manufacture stove polish for himself. Benny had a lot of knowledge from textbooks about chemistry and metallurgy. He could tell his father what tellurium was, but it took Meyer Guggenheim himself to learn how to get the water out of a mine. In a few months after he reached Leadville, the A. Y. & Minnie was being kept dry, and the ore was pouring to the surface.

Still the mine did not pay. Here was something more to learn. Meyer Guggenheim looked at the statement that he received from the smelter. It showed that they had shipped the ore and that the ore had been duly smelted and paid for. But the price barely paid for the cost of mining, shipping and smelting. The old man learned that he was not the only mine owner in that predicament.

The answer was that the ores from Leadville mines were not free-milling ores. The latter could be sent to a sampling mill and crushed, after which the metals could be extracted without difficulty. It was, in fact, a process only slightly more complex than panning. But, in most of the Colorado properties, the gold and silver were held in chemical combination with other geological substances. It took fire to release them. Hence the need for smelters.

Meyer Guggenheim was learning the lesson that all Colorado had been taught by Nathaniel P. Hill, the "father of smelting." This interesting individual had started his career as a professor of chemistry at Brown University. From this impecunious beginning, he went through several curious metamorphoses, winding up as a millionaire and United States senator. The ore prob-

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lem, you see, had begun to vex Colorado miners as early as 1864. Until then, they had been getting rich profits from the stuff on the surface, all of which was free-milling material. When that became exhausted, the proceeds declined. A cry for help went up first from Gilpin County, where the need was worst. Hill was brought West to solve it. He examined the ores, then went East and over the Atlantic to Swansea in Wales, where he studied the question exhaustively. Hitherto, all the American ore that needed to be smelted had to be transported as far as Swansea, a ruinously expensive process.

The result of Hill's expedition to Europe was the building of the smelter at Black Hawk in Colorado by the Boston & Colorado Smelting Company. Eleven years later, the same corporation erected a new and improved plant at Argo, near Denver. Other smelters in the State were due to J. B. Grant, subsequently governor, and to Anton Eilers, both graduates of the Academy of Freiberg, whence all the best geologists, metallurgists and chemists came at that day. The plants put up by these men, though not controlled by them, as they were scientific rather than business persons, had the fortunes of the miners in their power.

Such was the situation that faced Meyer Guggenheim. He met another malcontent, named Edward R. Holden, also a chemist. The latter had worked in the mines, then set up an assay shop in Leadville and, with the profits from that, built a sampling mill. When this became no longer profitable, he went to C. B. Kountze and Dennis Sheedy of the Colorado National Bank, to induce them to build the Globe smelter at Globeville, near Denver, in 1886. By the time that the Guggenheims arrived he was thoroughly dissatisfied.

"What's the use of having a mine," asked Meyer, "unless you have a smelter."

"None at all," replied Holden.

It was a vexatious problem for the former peddler of glue and stove polish. In order to protect a bad debt he had gone into the mining business. Now, in order to protect his mine, it looked as though he would have to become a smelter operator. How much further must the chain go?

At Holden's advice he did not plunge without learning something about the abyss into which he was plunging. He bought sixty thousand dollars' worth of stock in the Globeville smelter. He got Benjamin a job in the assay office and put Simon in as timekeeper.

The information that they obtained really shocked Meyer Guggenheim. Needless to say, he had not risen to the position, where he was able to buy and operate a mine, without having made large profits. But, when it came to one hundred and fifty per cent, he had to throw up his hands. Decidedly, he said, a smelter is the thing to own. Of course, he did not expect to run it simply for his own A. Y. & Minnie. There were plenty of other owners in Leadville and Cripple Creek, who were disgusted at the already existing smelters, so he could depend on them for business. Also, he would treat them more generously than the other smelters did.

So, with the advice and assistance of Holden, he began the building of the Philadelphia plant at Pueblo in 1888. It was a troublesome job for the engineers in charge of construction. They could not turn around, it seemed, without stumbling over a Guggenheim, everlastingly asking questions and everlastingly wanting to change the plans. But they got the smelter built, and it was an immediate success.

Meyer Guggenheim now apportioned the various departments of the work among his sons. Daniel, who had returned from Switzerland some years since, was set to studying railroad rates.

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The legal department was in charge of Murray. The administration was allotted to Simon, who represented the concern in all of its relations to customers and to the public. William, who went to the University of Pennsylvania in 1889 and there studied mining, metallurgy and chemistry, was sent to Mexico in 1891, and three years later supervised the building of another smelter near Aguas Calientes.

In short, the Guggenheim family had become one of the smoothest machines in the Republic, with every member fulfilling the function to which he was best suited. And, over all, was the wise, cunning, always learning head of Old Meyer Guggenheim himself. But he soon discovered that the smelters were not making all the profits that they should. There was something, it appeared, that he still must learn. The answer was in the refinery. Why should he pay somebody else to treat his bullion, which is the technical name for the product of a copper smelter, and his matte, which is the name that they give to what comes out of a lead smelter? Accordingly, he extended his activities still further and built his own refinery at Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

Eleven years after they had plunged into this industry, the Guggenheims owned four smelting plants. Moreover, the old man had hit on the real secret. Without mine owners to ship them ore, their works were useless. They would be at the mercy of the operators. They bought, accordingly, mines, shares, leases. In every camp, they acquired a name for the liberality of their dealings. When an operator was pressed for cash, he could always depend on the Guggenheims for a loan on easy terms.

In short, Old Meyer Guggenheim foresaw the fight that was coming. He realized that there were too many smelters in America, that they could not all live. The price of silver was falling and, in so doing, was wiping out the margin of profit for all the smaller plants. With his four he could not hope to control the field himself. But he knew that somebody else would try to and that he and his seven sons must either be absorbed or go through the fight of their lives.

The crisis came in 1899. That was the date of the organization of the American Smelting & Refining Company. Eighteen plants, of which seven were in and near Denver and the others scattered throughout the country, were merged, with a capitalization of sixty-five million dollars. The Guggenheims were invited to join, but the old man was too canny. As the biggest of the independents, he saw more than a fair chance of beating the new trust. Of this E. W. Nash was the first president, and J. B. Grant was chairman of the operating board, while the directors included Anton Eilers, the Lewisohns, and H. H. Rogers. Dennis Sheedy became general manager. Of the sixty-five million dollars they paid nineteen million dollars in cash for such plants as they had to buy.

The smaller smelters, which had been gradually failing ever since the fall in the price of silver, were forced out altogether. Even the larger ones had been forced to make contracts at a loss in order to keep running. The Guggenheims were the only survivors, except for the plants that were operated solely for the huge mines that owned them, such as the United Verde and Anaconda. And, failing to absorb the Guggenheims, the trust set out to crush them.

Now Meyer's record for fair dealing was a real asset to the firm. In the first year of its existence, the American Smelting & Refining Company ran into a strike. The Colorado legislature had passed an eight-hour law. The trust fought it and took the case to the supreme court, which declared it uncon-

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stitutional. The workers walked out. The Guggenheims, on the other hand, complied with the demands of the men and kept their plants running full blast.

Again, they made capital out of the dissatisfaction of the mine operators. Every contract with the trust, as it expired, became an asset for the ex-lace merchants. Moreover, the old man's prescience in observing that control of the ore supply was the key to the situation proved to be an impregnable bulwark. In addition to other activities, he had them organize the Guggenheim Exploration Company, at a capitalization of six million and five hundred thousand dollars for the purposes of gathering data as to the sources of ore supply, of acquiring and operating mines all over the world:

Every grievance against the trust was a stone in the sling of the Jews. It should be explained here that, when a mine owner sends his ore to a smelter, the latter treats it, extracts the valuable mineral and sends him a check therefor, on its own figures. Thus a man receives a statement, which informs him that his last shipment contained so much gold, so much silver and so forth. Against this, he is charged with the cost of smelting, with deductions for moisture, excess of zinc, and excess of silica, which are supposed to make smelting more difficult. Now the trust paid for gold at the rate of only nineteen dollars an ounce, whereas every one knows that he can get twenty dollars and sixty-seven cents an ounce at any branch of the United States mint. Naturally the miners set up a howl on this count. The trust countered with the objection that it was paying according to the assay figures and that the gold extracted was not pure. The miners retorted that the assay, as a matter of fact, always showed less gold than was actually recovered.

Of course, the Guggenheims took advantage of this dispute to announce that they would pay twenty dollars an ounce. The trust met this figure, but too late. Any one would prefer to deal with the man who offered fair terms on his own initiative and not by force of competition.

You may readily believe that it was no mean fight—the sixty-five-million-dollar trust with its eighteen plants, captained by experienced financiers and chemists of European reputation, against the Jewish lace merchants with their four smelters. But, at the end of two years, it was discovered that more than one third of the silver in America was being treated in the Guggenheim establishments, to say nothing of the other metals. The upshot was that the trust capitulated. It was not so officially represented, but that was what the agreement amounted to. And on what terms! The capital of the American Smelting & Refining Company was increased to one hundred million dollars. Of this, the Guggenheims received forty-two million five hundred thousand dollars in both preferred and common stock. And this was for plants whose cash cost was estimated at six million sixty-six thousand six hundred and sixty-six dollars. Furthermore, Daniel became chairman of the board of the reorganized corporation.

It was a handsome victory, and not even the enemies of the Guggenheims have ever ventured to say that it was not well earned. But there were those who did not like it. H. H. Rogers obtained an injunction against the enforcement of the pact. This was soon withdrawn and a second suit instituted. On the ground that the court had no jurisdiction, this again was dismissed. Thereupon, both Rogers and the Lewisohns retired from the board of directors.

Since its inception, the Smelter Trust has been the target for litigation and legislative attacks. Governor C. S. Thomas had a bill introduced into the legislature to keep it out of Colorado

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altogether. It is hardly necessary to say, however, that the State realized on which side its bread was buttered and the bill died.

After the failure of his attack in the courts, Rogers started a campaign on the stock exchange. It raged throughout April, 1901, and the bitterest efforts of the old buccaneer succeeded only in forcing the shares down from sixty-two to fifty-five dollars. In June of the same year, they climbed above par and Rogers regretfully gave up his foray.

Meyer Guggenheim's wife died in 1900 and, thereafter, his zeal gradually relaxed. Under the guidance of his sons, the great Smelter Trust forged ahead with irresistible force. Some of the plants were closed down. Competition, of course, was entirely abolished.

Simon, who had always been the official representative of the family in its relations toward the public, was able to indulge his political ambitions. Probably they were not so zestful, as some people thought. In 1893, he could have been elected to any office in the State. For that, as you will remember, was the year of the great panic in Colorado. Mines were shut down all over the State. Coxey's army was marching on Washington. A meeting of bankers, merchants, manufacturers, and smelter owners was called at the Brown Palace Hotel in Denver. There was a proposal to shut down everything in sight, as a means of retrenchment and as a warning to the malcontent public.

"Gentlemen, the rest of you can do as you please," said Simon Guggenheim, speaking for the family. "Our smelters will not close down."

The word went out all over the West, and Simon became the most popular man in five States. He did not, however, follow up his advantage, though he kept up a desultory contact with politics. He was nominated for governor on the Silver Republican ticket in 1898, but the fact that he had supported Bryan plus the antagonism of Senator Teller were against him. So he withdrew, and did not make any further advances until eight years later, when he was elected to the United States Senate. There he served only one term. He seemed, indeed, to find the game rather uninteresting. According to his own published admission, he took a purely utilitarian view of it and left no distinguishing mark. Although he was president of the American Smelting & Refining Company, with headquarters in Denver, he removed to New York some years ago, finding life there more amusing.

Meyer Guggenheim died of pneumonia in Florida on March 15, 1905. The fortune that he created was then worth, as will have been gathered, well over fifty million dollars. Quite aside from the control of the Smelter Trust interests, the Guggenheim Exploration Company has grown in value as it has in its ramifications. In Alaska, it built the Copper River & Northwestern Railroad at a cost of ten million dollars, and the Alaska Central at a cost of six million dollars. With the Morgan interests, it owns the Alaska syndicate and the Bonanza Copper King.

The American Smelting & Refining Company and the American Smelting Securities Company control mines in Chile and Mexico, California, Washington, Colorado and Missouri, to say nothing of coal mines and steamship lines to carry their ores. In short, M. Guggenheim's Sons have one of the dominating fortunes of America.

Perhaps the most characteristic fact about this peddler was that his name and the record of his achievements were always made secondary to his sons'. In every dictionary of biography, every reference book that contains any allusion to him, the first place is given to them. He was prouder of them than of all his struggles and all his millions.

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Dogs Have No Brains?

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "That Kid Sheriff," etc.

"YOU *do* take that dog so seriouslike, Jim. I can't understand it; you're sensible enough in other ways."

There was a twinkle in Mrs. Jim Westlin's dark eyes but there was no laughter in her voice.

"You talk to him like you do to me. Do you think for one minute he understands you? For instance, you tell him to stay here, at the cabin, while you're away; he acts like he understands, I admit. But he doesn't. He's never here. I've never seen him around, once, when you've been gone."

Jim Westlin smiled down into his wife's face. "You're jest *thinkin'* these here things, Ellen. You don't know Stub—yet. He's around, right enough. He——"

"Don't be silly, Jim. I *know* he's never anywhere near this cabin, when you're away. He doesn't know what it's all about. Dogs have no brains."

The object of this gentle argument lay flat on his belly at Jim Westlin's feet, his expressive eyes peering up into his master's face. As usual, before leaving for his claim in the hills, Westlin had bidden the dog remain at the cabin, to guard Jim Westlin's newly acquired wife—and incidentally over five thousand dollars in gold dust, which the man had taken from his claim and had been too busy to bank. As usual, Stub had accepted the instructions unwillingly, but with no idea of questioning or disobeying them. To him, the master's wishes, no matter how distasteful, were law.

There was always the hope though—expressed now by the slow wagging of his stumpy tail—that one day the old order of things would come back. For something over two years, Stub had been Jim Westlin's constant companion. Then, six months ago, Ellen, the woman, had come. During these six months, things had been different. Jim

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Westlin owned a valuable claim in the Merriwell Hills a couple of miles distant; for a time, the woman had accompanied the man to the claim each day.

For the last few weeks, however, she had stayed at the cabin. And Stub had stayed with her. That is, he was always near by, never farther than the edge of the clearing. He seldom went into the cabin, when the master was not at home. The woman did not want him. He was sure of this. Once, on a cold, wet day he had tried it; to show his good intentions, he had wagged his stub tail strenuously, thereby agitating the better part of his hundred-pound bulk. In this process he had tipped over a frail little table littered with odds and ends of sewing material belonging to the woman. She had become very angry and had chased him out with a broom. He hadn't tried it again.

"Only a few weeks more, Ellen, then we'll pack up and move to town."

Westlin stooped and nuzzled the big dog's ears gently.

"Jest a few days more, pup. I know whut you're thinkin'. But, stay on the job, an' watch Ellen clost. I think an awful lot of her, Stub. Watch her! Guard her!"

Stub growled lovingly deep in his throat and reached for the man's hand with his tongue.

When the prospector swung away through the bordering thicket, the big dog lay very still, nose in paws; once he whined softly, as he recalled those joyous romps through the woods of other days, then he came slowly to his feet and stalked dejectedly toward the green forest.

He sought out the well-shaded hollow in the briar thicket where he usually lay during the heat of the day. But, this day, he couldn't lie still. The clattering of pots and pans in the cabin, irritated him; the raucous call of a bluejay, brought him, growling, to his feet. He circled the cabin—always remaining well hidden in the spruce thicket.

At first he moved slowly, then, he ran. At last, he was tearing around and around, his smoky-gray body a swift-moving blur through the checkered shadows. Nose close to the ground, he followed his own tracks, in endless circles. All of this useless effort was unusual—for Stub. But, something was wrong, to-day. He *felt* it. Exhausted finally, he stopped, and, tongue lolling, tested the still air. The spruce-scented air told him nothing, yet he bristled and growled. He tried to sleep but could not. The racket in the cabin had ceased.

He drew near the substantial log building, on padded feet. The woman, her dishwashing and sweeping done, sat in the new chair, knitting. She hummed softly to herself, as her quick fingers maneuvered the fluffy pink yarn. Assured that all was well at the cabin, Stub crept stealthily away. The woman, as usual, had not seen him. The dog's roached hair still bristled, however, as he again circled through the thicket. That subtle sixth sense, which animals—and some men—possess, warned him of danger.

Suddenly, he stopped, stood as rigidly motionless as one of the gray boulders bordering the pathway. The still air told him little, but he knew that a man had recently passed near by. Since Jim Westlin had discovered gold in the Merriwell Hills, many men had come, stayed for a time, then moved on. This man was a stranger, Stub knew. After a bit he moved on, twitching nostrils close to the ground. When he finally came upon the stranger's tracks, he bristled and growled. He knew this man. Ross Nager! An enemy of the master's!

Of course, Stub didn't know the man's name, and he had been only a puppy when last that scent had crossed his path; still, he knew. Nager and the

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master had fought, in that dark, smoky, smelling room. The room in question was the general store at Custer. Jim Westlin, in town for supplies, had brought Stub—then a six-months'-old puppy—along with him. Tying the dog to a chair leg, he had engaged in a friendly game of cards with some cronies.

Then Ross Nager, the swaggering bully of a near-by construction camp, had come. Stub had lunged playfully at the bully's leg. Nager had kicked him. Stub remembered that kick; he would never forget. Of what happened immediately thereafter, he had only a confused picture. In Custer, however, the story of that fight between Ross Nager the bully, and Jim Westlin, the quiet, ever-smiling young miner, is history. Stub's canine memory recalled only a vast confusion of arms and legs. Some of these human limbs belonged to his master, some to this man—Ross Nager. When it was all over, the bully lay flat on his back on the floor. Then, Westlin had picked up the cause of the fight and strode away into the night, the hero of one of the best fights the lively little town of Custer had ever witnessed.

Nager's tracks led toward the cabin. Stub followed them slowly, cautiously, as he would the musky scent of a deer. Reaching the thicket edge, the tracks continued on across the little clearing. The man was not in sight. He was in the cabin. Stub could hear the low, rumbling voice.

Circling about, the dog approached the cabin from the rear; stalked around two sides of the log building, and paused, sniffing at the half-open door. The stiff hair on his neck stood upright; his white teeth were half bared in a snarl, but he made no move to enter the cabin. He merely watched, nostrils twitching, striving to sense what was going on in the cabin.

"Yeah, me an' Jim is old pals. Known him fer years, I hev. Heard he struck it rich down here an' figured I'd jest kinda stop in an' say howdy. I ain't had much luck lately; I'm on my uppers, so t' speak, an'—an'—I figured Jim 'ud be willin' fer ol' times' sake, t' grubstake me."

Ross Nager lounged back in the new chair, his dirty feet on the little sewing table. Clouds of smoke from a short pipe issued from his whiskered lips. He watched the woman through slitted eyes.

"I—I—really, I don't know. I—I had never heard Jim—er—mention your name. But, if what you say is true, he'll be glad to see you. He doesn't usually return until——"

The woman stopped at something she saw in Ross Nager's leering eyes. Looking about the cabin, he had espied a metal-bound chest in a corner. In that chest were several pokes of gold. That he suspected this was reflected in his dark face. And the woman, with quick intuition, was suddenly convinced that the man had been lying to her; he and Jim Westlin were not friends; he had come to this cabin to rob. Stub knew the instant fear came to Ellen Westlin. He edged nearer the half-open door. Ross Nager laughed unpleasantly.

"Well, mebbe 'twon't be necessary t' wait until Jim comes home. Come t' think of it, he warn't overly frenly last time I seen him. Thet chest now: I got a idee that's where he keeps them pokes o' dust I heard about. You don't need t' lie; I kin see frum the look on your face thet I'm a good guesser. An' so, I think I'll jest help myself. Jim's got plenty; he won't miss it."

Wide-eyed, helpless for the moment, the woman watched, as Nager, using a small crowbar which lay ready to hand, pried open the chest. He tossed a bag of dust on the table with a laugh. Slit it with a knife and poured a tiny golden stream of golden dust out into his palm.

"Ah!"

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Gloating over the golden shower, Nager's eyes left the woman for a moment. And, in that moment, her first alarm vanished. She sprang to her feet and reached for a rifle hanging on the wall. Grasped it and turned.

"Drop it!"

She screamed as Nager came toward her. Sought frantically to club the long-barreled gun. He caught it from her hands and tossed it aside. She screamed shrilly again and again.

"Shet up," he hissed. "I warn't goin' t' hurt you. An' I won't now if you keep your mouth shet. I——"

With frantic strength the woman caught up a stick from beneath the stove. Nager swore, sprang forward, gun upraised. Ellen Westlin stared horror stricken, up into that evil face; there was the will to murder there. She opened her mouth to call out, but no sound came from her dry throat. Then she looked frantically about, gauging the distance to that half-opened door. She couldn't make it before—— A dark shape appeared crouching in the doorway; a flash of glistening teeth.

"Stub," she gasped, "get him! Sic him, Stub!"

The upraised gun in Ross Nager's hand never fell. One hundred pounds of hurtling dog flesh struck the thief on the chest; flashing fangs clicked together within an inch of his throat, and, man and dog sprawled headlong to the floor. The rifle flew from Nager's hands. He fought wildly to keep those slashing fangs from his throat. Ellen Westlin covered her eyes. The man yelled hoarsely.

"Take him off. Fer Heaven's sake!"

"Stub! Stub! Here, boy! Stub!"

Growling, Stub backed reluctantly away. Gun in hand, the woman faced the trembling Nager. She was quite calm now; sure of her part.

"Get out!" she ordered.

Nager struggled to his feet, hands upraised. He sought to retrieve his rifle which lay on the floor near the door.

"Leave that alone! Get——"

He obeyed, one eye on the grimacing gray beast, crouching at the woman's feet. He shuddered as he went and brushed a hand fumblingly across his throat as though to rid himself of some intangible, clinging thing.

Ellen Westlin came of good old pioneer stock; she was a fighter through and through and she admired a fighter. Hence, the affair with Ross Nager, instead of leaving her limp and in tears, found her grim lipped, eyes shining, and with a wholesome respect for the fighting qualifications of the big dog which now squatted alertly at her feet. She knelt and placed her arms around Stub's neck. She didn't speak; there was that in the firm pressure of her warm arm that meant more than words. At first, Stub wasn't quite sure what it was all about.

In his brute mind there was no connection between his recent encounter with Nager and this sudden change in the woman's attitude toward him. He had protected the master's property, that was all. The master would reward him. A friendly pat on head, a word or two—that was all the reward Stub expected or desired.

"Good old Stub," the woman said. She caressed his ears with gentle fingers. Still, Stub did not understand. He came stiffly to his feet and stalked out of the cabin.

Before he reached the edge of the clearing he heard the woman's voice, calling him. He returned, slowly, doubtfully. The woman had never called him before.

"Stub, I'm afraid we've not seen the last of that devil. I have a feeling he is waiting out there. Of course, he is unarmed; I have a rifle and know how to use it. We—I will be safe until dark. Jim has been coming back late for the last week or so. It has been

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dark every night by the time he arrived. That man saw that there was a lot of dust there; he will try for it again. I feel sure of it. He will wait, and, when it is dark—— You must get Jim, Stub. Get him—somehow. Oh, if I only could make you understand!"

Rifle across her knees Ellen Westlin sat on the edge of the bed, her troubled brown eyes fixed on Stub's green ones. The dog wasn't sure what she had in mind. She was troubled, he knew, however, and he was loyally willing to help. He wagged his stub tail, ever so slightly.

"Go get Jim, Stub! Go get him! Get Jim!"

Stub's pointed ears lifted inquiringly. She was telling him to fetch the master. This would be easy. He whined softly. He was eager to go, but the master had told him to *stay at the cabin.* A kindly man was Jim Westlin; but, at the same time, he was a strict disciplinarian. The woman was telling him to leave the cabin. The man had told him *not* to leave the cabin. He would like to go and meet the man, of course. But he wouldn't do it. To Stub, the master's word was law. Nothing, but the master's voice, could get him to leave that cabin.

"Don't you understand, Stub? But you don't, I know."

The woman came to her feet and paced swiftly the length of the little room. Stub stood very still in the center of the floor, watching her uncertainly. He sensed that she was becoming angry. She usually did when he was around. He had probably done something that she didn't like. Tail sagging slightly, he edged toward the door.

"Come here, Stub!"

The dog stopped, but he made no move to obey her. If she reached for the broom he would run. She made no move to strike him. Instead, she caught his shaggy head between her palms. Her eyes were angry, though, Stub was positive of this.

"I hadn't ought to be mad at you, Stub, after what you just did. But you are *so* stupid. Listen to me now: I want you to get Jim. Understand? Get Jim!"

She forced him to the door, opened it and pushed him outside. "Get Jim, Stub! Go get Jim!"

Stub backed away, shook himself and sat on his haunches, watching the woman.

Ellen Westlin stamped her foot. "You stupid thing! If Jim Westlin ever talks to me about a dog having brains, again—— Get Jim, Stub!"

She threw a small stone. Stub interpreted this as a forerunner possibly of a bigger stone. He sauntered sedately away.

Inside the cabin the woman sank wearily into a chair. The only alternative was for her to go to Westlin. She hardly dared do this. She was in no condition to traverse that rocky trail. When in the best of health, the mile-long climb up the side of Merriwell Mountain to Jim Westlin's claim had been a difficult task. Now, it might prove fatal. No, she would stick it out. Jim *might* come before dark. That stupid dog! If only—— But no, the beast hadn't understood what she was trying to say.

In his accustomed place beneath the brush tangle on the thicket edge, Stub lay, head in paws, whining softly. The woman wanted him to get the master. He wanted to go, too. But he couldn't do it. If he left the cabin the man would be angry. Nager's scent came strong to him. The thief was hiding in the spruce thicket, behind the cabin. Stub decided to investigate. Not that he would attack the man without provocation; he was just curious.

Slowly, with a stealth equal to the wild things, with which he lived and fought, the big dog circled the little

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clearing. He came to within a rod of where Nager lay in the spruce thicket. Stood there, motionless as a gray rock, watching.

Dark clouds had suddenly overspread the sky. A puff of warm wind, rain laden, struck Stub's questing nostrils. And, in response to that first gusty breeze, a change came over the big dog. His sturdy body relaxed; eyes, ears, every inch of his powerful body, indicated joy unalloyed, for that wind had brought him news of the man. The master was on his way to the cabin. Stub circled wildly away. He didn't go to meet the man. He knew better than to do this; Westlin was still some distance away. He would whistle when he wanted Stub to join him. Whining eagerly, the big dog crouched in the vine tangle, head on one side, listening for that welcoming whistle.

Stub saw Nager when the latter left the clump of stunted spruce, but paid little attention. His every interest lay now in catching the first note of the man's shrill whistle.

Ellen Westlin had guessed correctly when she figured that Ross Nager's desperate avarice had been aroused by sight of Jim Westlin's gold. Crouching in the brush tangle, he planned ways and means of securing it. Unarmed, he feared the dog more than he did the woman. Westlin, himself, was the principal force to be reckoned with. He could overpower the woman, then shoot the dog, perhaps, and get away with the gold; but, in order to get well away it would be necessary to make sure that Westlin would not follow him.

The smiling prospector was a bad man to mix with. No one had better cause to know this than Ross Nager. So it was that Nager decided to seek out Jim Westlin. Neighboring prospectors had told him in a general way the location of Westlin's claim. He would lie in wait along the trail, with a club. Then, with Westlin's gun, he would soon dispose of the dog and the woman. Then—for the gold. There were five thousand dollars easy, in those leather pokes, if he was any judge.

Stub saw when Nager crept away from his hiding place, but, unfortunately, had no way of knowing the man's murderous intentions.

Nager came upon his prospective victim sooner than expected. A vagrant shaft of sunlight streaming through the black clouds pointed out Jim Westlin as he crossed an open space in the valley below. Grasping a thick stick, Nager hid himself beside the trail.

Jim Westlin was returning to the cabin earlier this day. The reason for this lay in the pocket of his coat—twin nuggets of virgin gold, worth over a thousand dollars. He was anxious to show his find to Ellen. His stride was long. He was very happy. Nearing the top of the ridge where the bandit waited, Westlin cupped his hands and whistled shrilly.

Then he watched the darkening pathway ahead for a sign of that wildly dashing gray form. Every night at approximately this same spot he whistled for Stub, and it was a never-ending source of wonder to him, the speed with which the big dog covered the strip of broken country between this wooded ridge and the cabin. It seemed almost as though Ellen must be right: the dog couldn't be *at* the cabin and reach this ridge in the time he did. Of course, the dog was fast. Despite his bulk, he could outrun a coyote in open flight. The man grinned. Good old Stub! And Ellen thought the old cuss had no brains. That dog knew more than some men.

Just before reaching the clump of close-growing alders behind which Nager waited, Westlin stopped. The wind had shifted, he noticed. It was blowing from the cabin toward him. Perhaps Stub had not heard. Well, it would be useless to whistle again. With

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a shrug, he passed on. A vague premonition sent a shudder of warning up and down his back as he came abreast of the alder clump. He partly turned and glimpsed at Nager's black-whiskered face. He jumped aside but it was too late. The club landed atop his head.

Stub had *not* heard the man's whistle, but he knew when the man reached the top of the ridge. The shifting winds had brought the scent strongly to him. Sometimes the man forgot to whistle. No doubt, he had forgotten to-day; but the master had reached that spot—atop the ridge—where they usually met. He circled the cabin, once, yelping sharply to assure the woman that the master was coming, then he dashed away, a gray-blue streak through the early dusk.

As usual, Stub covered the broken country between the cabin and the ridge top in record time; he knew every stump and boulder, every rift and rock-lined coulee. Dashing along the open ridge top, the warm air apprised him of Nager's presence. He saw Westlin stop; saw him fall following that cowardly blow. Nager stooped and came erect again with Westlin's rifle in hand. Stub ran as he had never run before. Disregarding the open pathway, he cut up a brush-strewn slope.

Noise of the dog's speeding body attracted Nager's attention. He had been standing over Westlin's body, pondering the advisability of sending a bullet into his victim's head. He had just decided to empty the rifle into the unconscious prospector, when he caught sight of Stub. He swore and turned the rifle on the dog. Once, twice, he fired, sighting carefully. Following the last shot the dog fell, and, after some scrambling about, lay very still. Nager hurried away. It had just occurred to him that it was foolish to have fired that rifle. No telling who might be hanging around. These hills were quite thickly populated, now. It was not the hunting season. Some one might investigate. He would get the gold and beat it. Westlin was out, dead maybe. And the dog!

But Stub was not dead. Far, far from it! The bandit's last shot had made a neat little furrow along the top of his head. Dazed, he had pitched headlong into a briar-cluttered wash. But he was himself again almost immediately. Instead of rushing out into the open, however, he had crept stealthily through the bush toward his objective. He fully appreciated that a man with a rifle was an exceedingly dangerous antagonist. Belly close hugging the ground, he reached the spot where Westlin lay, before Nager was out of sight. He hesitated for an instant, undecided whether to follow Nager or stay with the master. The decision was made for him.

Westlin moved ever so slightly, then sat up. He squinted after Nager's disappearing form, rubbed his sore head, and swore softly. Westlin had been playing 'possum. The glancing blow had stunned him for a moment only, long enough, however, for Nager to gain possession of the rifle. From that point on, Westlin had simulated unconsciousness.

"Stub," he called guardedly.

For a long minute, Stub had lain behind a log less than a rod away, waiting for the master to make some sign. He reasoned correctly that just now was no time for the usual noisy demonstration. At sound of the master's voice he slipped noiselessly into the open.

Without a word, the man inspected the wound in the dog's head. Stub knew that he had gauged things right: this was a time for silence.

Still without speaking, Westlin snapped his fingers softly, and slipped away into the bush. In the first open space, the man knelt above Nager's track in the sand. He pointed silently. Stub understood. They were going hunting. The master was hunting the

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man with the rifle. Good! He would enjoy this immensely.

Jim Westlin and Stub were hunters, par excellence. Many times had they trailed a buck deer for hours through the noisy autumn thickets. They understood each other perfectly.

Nose to the ground, Stub unerringly traced Nager's tracks through the black thicket. The dog moved noiselessly and slowly, always making sure that the man was close by, so that, if instructions were necessary, a guarded whisper would reach him. So had they hunted many times before.

Stub had not proceeded far, before he realized that the master was not his usual confident self. Several times the man stumbled; once he fell. Westlin was still dizzy from the blow he had received. It was a surface sickness only, however; his thoughts were clear, alert.

When the jagged outlines of the cabin appeared through a fringe of black-trunked spruces, a hissing whistle brought Stub to a halt. Motionless, he waited for the man to come up. Fingers clutching the dog's loose neck skin, the man crouched on the edge of the clearing, striving to steady his erratic vision. When things finally came clear, Westlin breathed a sigh of relief. Nager had not yet tackled the cabin. Evidently, he hoped to surprise Ellen.

He was crawling across the shadowed open, on hands and knees, toward the rear of the cabin. It was about fifty yards across that dusk-blurred open space. Nager had covered about half the distance. Swiftly, Westlin mapped out a plan of action; but, just as he was about to put it into effect, the door of the cabin swung open and Ellen Westlin appeared, rifle in hand. For a long minute she peered out toward the fringe of black trees, then, she sat on the doorstep, rifle across her knees. Nager raised on an elbow. The woman was in perfect silhouette against the jagged skyline. Stub felt Westlin's fingers tighten. His big body tensed. At last came the long-expected command.

"Git him, Stub!"

Without a sound the dog sprang forward. Noiseless as were his movements, however, Nager heard. He turned his head and yelled, as he saw the onrushing, green-eyed beast; struggled to his knees and sought to focus the rifle on the dog. Stub never faltered in his headlong dash. He struck the thief head on; his teeth grated along the rifle barrel, then, his hurtling body struck flesh, and man and dog sprawled backward on the ground.

So much Jim Westlin saw out of the corner of an eye as he ran across the clearing toward the cabin.

"Ellen," he called.

"Jim, oh Jim!"

Westlin snatched the rifle from her hands. Nager was on his feet now. With a mighty effort he kicked free of the silent, ever-fighting dog. Lifted the rifle above his head, club fashion. Jim Westlin fired from the hip. Due to his erratic vision, the shot went wild, but Ross Nager froze in his tracks. So also did Stub. He was waiting for Nager to fall. Things always fell when his master's rifle spat fire. Nager did not fall but he was thoroughly beaten. Breathing hard, white face twitching, he begged for mercy.

It was evening of the next day before things were back to normal at the Westlin cabin. Neighboring prospectors, hearing the firing, had come in and taken Ross Nager to Custer. In the cool purple dusk Jim Westlin and his wife sat on the doorstep of the little cabin. Inextricably wedged between their feet, lay Stub, head in paws, pleasantly dozing.

"You gotta hand it to the pup, Ellen. Y'see, they was jest one way o' wriggling outa thet hole, las' night: there you was on the doorstep, a perfec' target fer Nager; I didn't have no gun; I

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couldn't reach him before he got me. In another ten seconds he prob'ly would of plugged you. It was up to Stub. The ol' dog knew jest whut was expected of him an' he sure done his stuff. Say, he covered thet twenty-five yards in nothin' flat. W'y, I hadn't started t' run before he was on top of Nager. Yes sir, he sure done a job. Not so bad fer a no-account houn'dog without no brains!"

In the dim light Ellen Westlin smiled. She surreptitiously palmed a piece of sweet cake into Stub's mouth. He gulped it down and silently begged for more.

"We'll be movin' t' town in a few days. Expect I'll prob'ly give Stub t' George Marsh; he likes dogs. Ain't no sense in draggin' this here brainless mutt along; he'll only eat us outa house an' home."

Still smiling, Ellen Westlin found her husband's hand in the darkness. "If you'll give me a chance, Jim, I'll say what you've been wanting me to say: I take it all back about Stub. And what's more, he's going to town with us. In fact, wherever I go from now on—he goes."

And Stub, although he had not the least idea what the master and the woman were talking about, wriggled joyously. Something told him that things were going to be very pleasant from this time on.

A NEVADA ARGONAUT

THE career of Benjamin Franklin Leete, who died in Reno, Nevada, a few weeks ago, in his ninety-sixth year, was marked by many episodes that place him in the front rank of Western pioneers. Leete journeyed to the West in 1858 by way of the Isthmus of Panama, arriving in San Francisco in August of that year. One of his first jobs in the West was on the construction of levees on the Sacramento River. Later, he joined the projectors of the Central Pacific Railroad and participated in making the original location survey for that line between Sacramento and Roseville.

From California, he went to Nevada, settling at Dayton. There he constructed the Eagle Salt Works, in 1869, and operated them for some years thereafter. He also was the owner of the railroad which led to the salt works, but this was destroyed when the Southern Pacific built its Susanville branch. He was one of the first to realize the value of the salt supply obtained by the evaporation of water from the wells, chiefly because of its proximity to the Comstock mines, where its utility in the treatment of ores was demonstrated. For many years, the salt industry in which Leete was engaged was highly profitable, but its advantages became less marked when railroad development and lower freight rates enabled the mines to obtain their supplies from other big salt-producing centers, thus establishing competition and consequent lower prices.

Mr. Leete had the opportunity of witnessing the development of the Territory and later the State of Nevada from its earliest days, and he contributed not a little himself to that development. He had considerable mining interests all over the State and was also active in promoting irrigation to make the desert lands of Nevada productive by bringing water to the soil.

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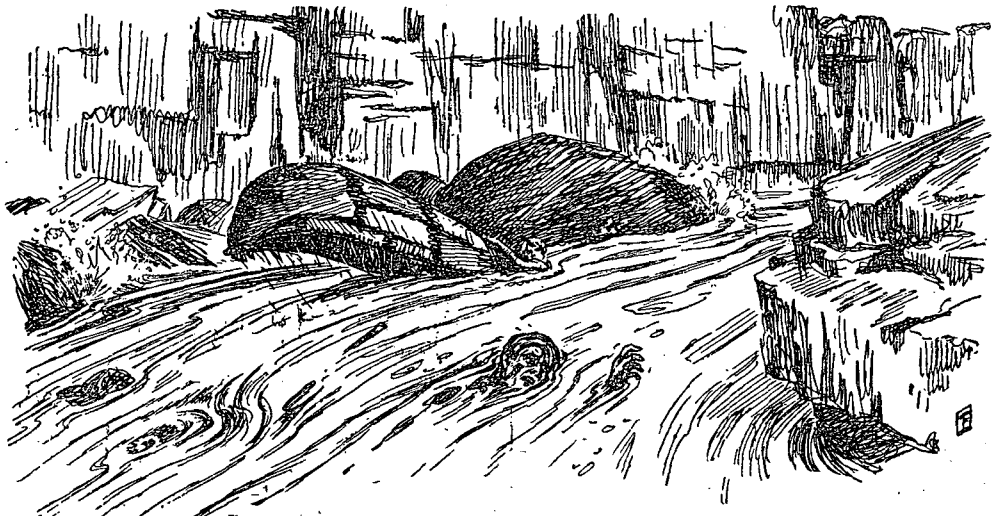

The Ninety-six-Ounce Nugget

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Silvertip's Cub," etc.

OLD Dan Walling lived in a cabin just above Cold Deck. He was getting too old, he said, to ford glacial streams and let his wet clothing dry on him as he mushed from creek to creek. But there were a number who did not believe Walling. He could step over the trail with the best of them in a pinch. However he had stopped prospecting and worked hard at the business of trapping fur in the winter. In the spring, when the sap runs and the blood of age runs hot with gold fever, Dan generally grubstaked a man or two. "Got twice as good a chance with two men out as I would have if I went alone. A man can't be two places at once," he would tell them.

"But you'll have to split fifty-fifty with whoever strikes it for you!" his friends objected.

"Sure, then two of us will be happy. Anyway it don't take much dust to keep a man going when you get my age."

And so he continued trapping in the winter, sending others forth in the spring, while in summer he operated a fish wheel. The salmon were caught by the thousand, split, dried on the racks, baled, and sold to dog mushers for food.

"Some day," the gossips said, "Dan's men will come sneaking in with a report of a strike, and you watch him go."

"And when Dan goes, watch me go with him," a score of them had promised. "I'll be right on his heels."

For the most part the men in this group were of the type that worked just enough to get by and spent the remainder of the time waiting for something good to "turn up."

Nothing ever seemed to turn up, but the type is a born optimist. Something soft is usually just around the corner, and they die poor but hopeful. But the years passed, and Dan's men returned each year empty handed.

And then at last in the midst of winter, "The Hard Luck Kid," as old as Dan himself, came in on the wings of a

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snowstorm. No one saw him arrive because the flakes were falling so thickly a man could not see ten feet ahead of him. His dogs, with the amazing gift to find their way home, guided the sled, rather than The Kid. He passed his own cabin and drew up before Walling's place. He was securing the leader with a short chain to keep him handy when "Red" Murphy emerged. He had been to see Dan about buying several bales of dried salmon and thoughts of a possible stampede were far from his mind. Yet the instant he saw The Kid he flattened himself against the cabin wall and squirmed to the cover afforded by the woodpile. Here he crouched while The Kid came up the path to Dan's cabin.

"He's traveled far," Red muttered. "He's about all in!"

The Kid knocked, then shouted, "Hello, Dan, it's The Hard Luck Kid. Great News!"

Dan's door opened, then closed on The Kid. Red Murphy leaped from his hiding place and pressed his ear close to the window. "Traveled fast, Dan; figured you'd want to hit the trail tonight."

"I've waited a long time for this," Dan answered, "I can wait a few minutes for details. Wait'll I fix you a cup of tea."

Hot water was available in the tea kettle and a few moments later The Kid was gulping down the hot liquid. "That sure takes a hold, Dan." He sighed heavily. "And now for details."

Either because he was tired, or because he instinctively lowered his voice, only a portion of his words reached the eavesdropper. Red Murphy hardly dared breathe so eager was he to catch fragments of conversation from within. "Crossing Porcupine Creek—evening—just by luck—plumb crazy—excitement—believe it or not, Dan!"

"Sure—believe it," Dan answered. "What—weigh?"

"Ninety-six ounces!" The Kid's voice came distinctly enough in the matter of weight.

Red Murphy whistled in his amazement. "A ninety-six-ounce nugget Let's see. At sixteen dollars an ounce that'll be around fifteen hundred dollars. Say, that's something worth picking up. If there's one nugget that size, there're more. I've heard enough!"

He was about to leave his hiding place when the door opened. Again he slunk to the woodpile. Dan Walling came out tossing comments over his shoulder as he walked. "I'll take care of your team, Kid, and then clear out. You stay at my cabin until I get back—plenty of grub and fuel."

Evidently Dan had heard enough, too. He was taking the trail that night.

As he drove the team toward his kennels it was apparent the dogs had traveled far. Usually erect and alert huskies, each from leader to wheeler moved slowly with tails dragging. Red shook his head wisely. "Everything confirms my suspicion the great day has come. One of Dan's prospectors has struck it!"

Red waited until the way was clear then he vanished in the storm. He broke into a trot, his moccasins thudding softly on the freshly fallen snow. One or two shadowy forms observed his speed and paused to reflect. "It's either a fire, a stampede, or somebody's after him!"

The siren on "Flapjack" Meehan's mine building was not screaming, nor were there signs of pursuit. "Could it be a stampede?" Alaskan nights are long, and time often hangs heavy on one's hands. Invariably reflection was followed by the intention of following Red and seeing what happened.

He stopped at the first trading post and laid in a supply of trail grub. "Hitting the trail, Red?" the trader suggested.

"Yeah! Figure to do a little trapping!"

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"Then you'll need some traps," the trader suggested, "now I've got a good line of——"

"Got all the traps I need," Red answered.

The trader knew for a fact Red did not have more than three or four traps to his name. He looked wise and winked. "Somebody struck it, eh?"

"Not that I've heard of!"

Red vanished.

And that was the beginning of the Porcupine Creek stampede. Word traveled from mouth to mouth with amazing rapidity. Two and two were put together again and again. Invariably the total was four. Some one had seen Dan Walling quietly leaving town. Red Murphy had bought trail grub. Investigation disclosed the fact that two dog teams had left town carrying little more than grub.

Whispers become normally spoken words; and words, shouts. The individual who always likes to be the center of things rushed into the New Deal Café. "New strike, boys! She's on Porcupine Creek, and they've taken out a ninety-six-ounce nugget!"

Meals were forgotten, and every man in the café crowded about the speaker. He told what he had heard, then added what he believed and called his yarn facts.

Flapjack Meehan and "Tubby" Willows, Cold Deck's foremost citizens, were financially independent, and yet long ago they had learned it was not the gold but the getting it that lured men on. The old flame burned within them. "Shall we go, Tubby?" Flapjack inquired.

"Sure, let's make a real party out of it!"

The partners had just returned from Big Nugget where they had been the guests of Joe Hardy, who had also invited "All-around" Austin of Frying Pan up for the Christmas holidays to get the smell of sage from his nostrils. Flapjack and Tubby had brought All-around and Joe back with them.

"Come on, All-around," Flapjack urged, "get into your Alaskan togs. We're going on a stampede. Ninety-six-ounce—or was it pounds—nugget found. Don't see how I missed it. I need something like that for a paper weight."

"I could use a few good heavy nuggets in my store at Frying Pan," Austin admitted. "I'm with you."

Flapjack turned to "Dad" Simms, Alaska's oldest inhabitant. "You keep an eye on things, Dad!"

"Not by a gol-durned site will I keep an eye on things. I'm going along too, This may be my last stampede. I ain't so young as I used to be."

"He's been saying that for years," Tubby explained. "Sure, come along, Dad."

By this time the streets of Cold Deck were filled with excited men. Dogs that had settled down for an easy winter found themselves jerked from warm kennels and harnessed to sleds; traders instead of closing for the night, put on additional clerks. Every map showing Porcupine Creek was in demand. Men traced it carefully and wondered why it had been overlooked in the past. "Ninety-six-ounce nuggets," men repeated again and again, "around fifteen hundred dollars—not bad for a day's work!"

As team after team hurried away on the trail left by the flying Dan Walling and the excited Red Murphy, Dad Simms drew All-around Austin aside, "Listen, Austin, know anything about shooting white water?"

"When I was younger," All-around answered, "I was pretty slick with paddle and oar!"

"I'm too old and you're too inexperienced to keep up with these fast dog mushers. Now there ain't a man in camp that'll catch Dan Walling—he's got too good a start. There'll be a fine

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[illegible]een Flapjack and Tubby's [illegible]s and Joe Hardy's Malemutes [illegible]ip, his famous lead dog. We've g[illegible] beat 'em. I don't think Birch River's froze up yet. If she isn't, we can beat 'em all! And in stampedes first come, first served. I'd like to be there waiting when Flapjack pulls in and say, 'Hello, Flapjack, what delayed you? Didja have tire trouble or burn out a bearing?' Heh! Heh! Heh!" Dad cackled. "Pretty good, eh, Austin?"

"I'm with you, old-timer," said Austin. He walked over to Flapjack and Tubby. "You fellows run along, I'm teaming with Dad Simms this trip. He's got a trick with a hole in it."

"All right, All-around, we'll stake you some ground," Flapjack answered. "All you'll have to do is to move onto it and begin picking up big nuggets."

"Don't worry about me, Flapjack. I'll stake my own ground and erect a few monuments on yours, too. S'long and good luck!" He waved his hand as Flapjack and Tubby, Joe Hardy and "Rough" Rhodes raced down the street together. Three of the best teams in the North, neck and neck—it was a thrilling sight. On the outskirts of town Tip, driven by Joe Hardy, took the lead.

Dad and All-around found a sled, lashed a canoe to it, loaded in sufficient provisions and set off in the wake of the others. "They've broken a good trail," the old-timer observed, "and necking this sled won't be hard until we get to the mountains, then it's a stiff climb for five miles. Do you get tuckered out easy, Austin?"

"I manage!" All-around answered, without admitting anything. "Those boys sure have a fine start on us!"

"It ain't the start, it's the finish that counts in a stampede. You work it this way, put this harness around your shoulders like they do a dog, then pull. I'll spell you after a while!" All-around carefully obeyed instructions. Slowly they moved through the night. The stampede was ahead of them.

Dawn found them through the pass, and the weather changed. It was snowing on the Cold Deck side of the range, but clear on the Porcupine Creek side. A glacier filled the pass through which they had dragged the canoe. Far below them moved tiny dark objects—stampeders and their teams. "Suppose Flapjack's one of 'em?" Austin suggested, pausing to rest.

"No, he's over the edge of the world by this time! Them you can see are stragglers with poor teams. Off to the left is the headwaters of Birch Creek." Dad indicated a stream of snow water. "She gets better ten miles down. We'll get there as quick as we can; the boys have made better time than I figured they would!"

Stopping only for a light breakfast which included hot tea, the pair moved ahead. There is scant time to rest during a gold rush if one hopes to be in on the money.

For an old man supposedly awaiting the end, Dad Simms showed surprising speed. His old cheeks were glowing with color, his eyes sparkling, his step alert. They made the next ten miles in three hours. Birch Creek had changed to a foaming torrent that roared over, or sucked between, dark boulders which in places were coated with ice.

Occasionally slabs of ice from the glacier floated on the crest of the flood or grounded on gravel bars and formed small jams. Dad loaded the canoe with exceeding care, placed All-around Austin in the bow and took the stern paddle himself. "I guess you'll know what to do, Austin, having been in white water before. Well, here goes!"

The stream caught them, and the shore line commenced to move backward. Within twenty minutes they had passed the first of many dog parties. Two men and a team of five dogs were resting and eating breakfast. The men

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gazed in astonishment, then ran down to the edge of the stream and watched the canoe out of sight. "If they get there at all, which I doubt," one of them commented, "they get there first. Must be a couple of fool kids."

"Looked like Dad Simms and that fat storekeeper from Frying Pan," his partner replied. "Look at that! They're gone!" The canoe had disappeared in a smother of foam. The men ran to a ridge and looked down. They could see the stream for a mile—a black, twisting tape over the snow, but flecked frequently with splashes of white marking rough water. In the exact center the canoe moved at a furious pace, safe and upright.

All night they had worked their legs, now they were working their arms. Other parties flashed back of them and five hours from the time they entered the stream, Dad began to look for Flapjack. Several of the faster parties were hurrying along, but from occasional glimpses Dad could see there was a well-broken trail, indicating that a number of parties were ahead.

The next two miles were through a series of cañons. The water ran so swiftly in places that the center was above the sides. The walls were ice coated and grim. Dad grinned from sheer joy of the danger. "Not much chance of getting out alive if we'd upset here, Austin!" He gave a twist of the paddle to bring the craft into a position to take the next plunge. The canoe shot half into the air, cleared a small falls and continued on. "Make you think of the desert around Frying Pan?"

"Yeah," Austin answered, "it's so different. At this rate we'll beat 'em all there."

Through an open space they rushed, then into another cañon. Half through Austin pointed ahead. "I make out two teams going over that ridge," he shouted.

"Can't see 'em, my eyes are kinda dim," Dad replied. "But watch 'em; if one of 'em's Flapjack, the other's Joe Hardy."

Two minutes of silence followed, then All-around shouted. "Yep, it's Flapjack. I can recognize the long drink of water by his parka. We've got 'em beat!"

"Yep, if we're lucky!"

It was evident Flapjack had observed the canoe, also. The moment he topped the ridge, excitement commenced. For perhaps two seconds they saw the tall figure outlined against the sharp, clear air, then he began running toward the river at a furious pace. "Something's wrong ahead!" Austin cried. "Are you sure this river doesn't end in a big waterfall?"

Dad was well along in years, and it occurred to Frying Pan's genial storekeeper that Dad might have forgotten some such little detail as a hundred-foot waterfall—there were thousands of them in the country.

"No big falls, but plenty of rapids in this river. Keep your ears open and try to catch what he says as we go by."

Nervously All-around obeyed. He pulled back the hood of his parka and listened. Flapjack was on his stomach, his head over the edge of the gorge, his hands cupped about his mouth forming a megaphone. "Ice jam!" he bellowed, "Ice jam! Get ashore. First chance. Ice jam! Ice jam!" He fairly screamed the last.

"Ice jam!" Austin repeated.

"Sufferin' Malemutes!" yelled Dad. "We'll get wet, and this icy water won't do my rheumatism no good! Be ready for anything."

All-around was ready for anything—including death.

There was something almost gleeful in the way the water hurried them on, as if through the entire course it had been awaiting this moment. Into the open they shot, and a mile ahead they could see the ice piled up. There was no avoiding it. The river, for the most

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part, piled into an ice cave, then disappeared through a dark hole with a whining, sucking sound. A half dozen smaller streams dropped between jammed slabs carried down from the glacier. The bank on either side ranged from six to a hundred feet in height, depending on the position of the river. The walls were sheer and coated with ice. "And the heck of it is," Dad growled, "a half mile beyond that jam, there's smooth water and this stream joins Porcupine Creek."

"We've got to be ready to jump and hang on," All-around announced.

Both men knew they had a chance in a million. It is easy enough to jump, but to grab and cling to ice is next to impossible. With the coolness that comes from long experience facing tight situations the pair prepared for any break fate might give them. It was All-around Austin who first saw anything approaching real hope. He began to tie the various lines together, until he had quite a respectable lariat. "Keep her on an even keel, Dad, and I'll see what I can do."

Next he formed a loop which he tossed Dad. "Put that around your waist, old-timer. I'll fasten the other end to myself. When I go overboard you follow me. We'll both come through or neither of us will."

Austin's eyes were riveted on a snag two hundred yards downstream. The bank at this point was hardly six feet high. As they approached, All-around risked everything on his skill with the rope. The loop shot outward and fell fairly over the snag. "I hope it's solid! Maybe I can pull this craft into the bank and——"

Further words were lost as the rope tightened. The craft was moving too swiftly for one man to stop it. All-around was lifted clear and the very next moment the canoe overturned. "Wow!" yelled Dad as the cold water struck him.

As he expected Austin swung into the bank. Twice he crawled almost to the top, but each time the weight of Dad Simms dragged him down. "You can't make it, All-around, with me on it, too! The current is too swift. Just a minute, and I'll cut you clear!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" Austin bellowed. Then in desperation he climbed once more. Again the current jerked Dad violently, and again Austin was jerked back into the stream. He was tiring rapidly. As he started again in a final desperate effort, Dad brought forth a knife. Again and again he hacked at the line. "I'm old enough to die anyway," he muttered; "might just as well go out in action, it'll be over in a second or two. Besides, All-around is a guest in Alaska, anyway." With a final slash the line parted, and the next moment Austin was on the bank.

All-around looked down and saw the severed line. "Dad!" he cried. "Dad! You brave old son-of-a-gun."

He could see the old sour dough, almost smothered in the foam of the rapids, fighting desperately to remain afloat. Coiling the line again, All-around ran along the bank, stumbling and falling, but always keeping even. Dad had managed to work his way from the main channel into one of the smaller streams, a stream that disappeared through several blocks of ice. Bits of wood eddied about the spot, then vanished with startling abruptness. Dad Simms went into the whirlpool and eddied twice, then down he went. There was a prayer on All-around Austin's lips as he looked at the spot, then slowly the old-timer's head came to the surface. "I'm stuck!" he roared. "Stuck, for a second!"

He lifted his blue hands upward and All-around understood. Again the lariat coiled and dropped over Dad's hands. His arms went to his side and All-around began to pull. Bit by bit he

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hauled Dad from the pool; grudgingly the waters gave up their prey.

Dad staggered as he was drawn into quiet water and ashore. Then he fell, but only for a moment. "Take a hold of my arm, Austin, and run with me. I got my heavy woolens on, and maybe I'll warm up. Right now we're ahead of the field, and this is a stampede!"

Austin caught the stiff old arm and began to run. Dad jerkily kept pace, then slowly his muscles began to loosen up. Presently the blue left his face and hands and the glow of life returned to his cheeks. "Keep going. There's a cabin on Porcupine Creek, and we'll dry out there!"

A quarter of a mile farther they sighted the cabin. Smoke was pouring from the chimney, and Dad's eyes sparkled. "This is the fun of the stampede," he panted, "not the gold itself. Fightin' man and nature and beating the both of 'em is worth while. Danged if I don't feel young again."

"Me too! There's the creek. We're first except for Red Murphy. He's staking a claim I see. We'll stake one along side of him, eh?"

"Two of 'em. Let me go now, Austin, I can last until I stake my ground."

The two parted.

Dan Walling stepped in front of the cabin and puffed several times on his pipe. "Now, where'd all the men come from? That's the Cold Deck gang, sure! And more a-coming! There's Flapjack and Joe Hardy racing neck and neck. It's a dead heat! That looks like Dad Simms up there and that feller from the cow country, All-around Austin. How'd they beat Flapjack? Huh! They're wet!"

Dad reëntered the cabin and stirred up the fire. When he opened the door again quite a crowd had gathered. "Where is it, Dan? Where's the strike?"

"What strike?"

"What strike?" The crowd jeered. "What strike! Come through, Dan, you got your ground staked give the rest of us a chance. We don't want to stake Porcupine Creek unless the gold is there."

"What gold?" replied Dan.

"Why—er—ah—I just happened to hear you mention a ninety-six-ounce nugget!" explained Red Murphy. "Then you hit the trail, so I followed; and this gang followed me."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" Dan Walling grinned. "Want to see the nugget? Well, I'll show it to you. The rest of you stay outside, but Austin and Dad Simms had better come in and dry out."

While the crowd waited impatiently, Dan entered a back room of the humble cabin. It was evident that whoever occupied the cabin were engaged with a struggle against poverty—and barely holding their own.

Flapjack scratched his head. "This is where Dan's daughter lives, come to think of it. She married a fellow that got gassed during the war and came up here to get well. I hear that he's about as good as he ever was and will be doing a day's work before long. I'm sure glad they struck it!"

Then came Dan's voice. "Here's the nugget, weighs ninety-six ounces—too big to get into a moose-hide poke, so we're keeping it in a blanket. Take a look, boys, at my first grandson!"

"A baby!" exclaimed Red Murphy. "Well, dog-gone. That's sure one on me!"

"Yes, a baby. Don't you think he's worth his weight in gold? When I heard he'd arrived I went faster than I ever did on a stampede," Dan Walling explained, thrusting out his chest. "He kinda favors me a bit around the eyes!"

Wealth cannot increase, nor poverty decrease, the appeal of a baby. Amid the humble surroundings; amid the cheapness of his baby clothes, the

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youngster stood forth like a precious jewel. Yes, a nugget of pure gold if ever the North had produced one.

Every man present felt it, but Flapjack Meehan, ever one to act on the impulse, was the first to do something about it. "Worth his weight in gold!" he exclaimed. "You bet he's worth his weight in gold. Stay right where you are. I've got an idear!"

Flapjack entered the cabin and was gone several minutes, but when he emerged he carried two large boxes of exactly the same weight. While the others looked on, he fastened a number of moose-hide lines about them, then he cut a birch pole and fastened a box to each end. The next move was to drive a forked limb into the ground and place the pole across it, forming a scales of a sort. "Now, Dan," he ordered, "you put that there youngster into one of the boxes."

Gently Dan Walling placed the boy in the box and stood back. The baby lay blinking with blue eyes at a blue sky and wondered, no doubt, what it was all about.

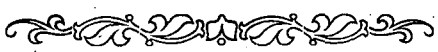
"And now," directed Flapjack, "it's up to us to prove this boy is worth his weight in gold, and then some!" With this he opened up a moose-hide poke containing a number of nuggets and tossed them into the box. "Get the idea, gents?"

Evidently the "gents" got the idea. Tubby Willows was next; then came Joe Hardy; then Dad Simms, and then All-around Austin. He did not have any gold nuggets, but he had five twenty-dollar gold coins which helped some.

Slowly the scales balanced, then the baby was lifted higher in the air as the box containing the gold grew heavier and sagged lower. Presently the box touched the ground.

The stampede was over. Every man present had stampeded at some time or another for less cause. Flapjack Meehan led the cheers and started back for Cold Deck. One by one the others followed. It was a great old world.

"Yeah," muttered Dan Walling as he carried the gold into the house, "it'll give his mother and father a real start now. He's worth his weight in gold—and then some! The boys proved it!"



HEAP BIG MONEY FOR QUAPAWS

LARGE sums in royalties accumulated to the credit of the Quapaw Indians, who live on a reservation in northeastern Oklahoma, during the past year. The total from the production of zinc and lead on their lands for 1926 was $1,679,836. This represented an increase of $422,717 in royalties over the previous year. The lead and zinc mined on the allotments of these Indians during the year was 289,622 tons, as compared with 259,432 for the preceding twelvemonth, a gain of 30,190 tons, with a corresponding gross increased value of over two and a half million dollars.

One of the largest incomes was that received by Anna Beaver Bear, amounting to $220,755. Others to enjoy large payments were Robert Lottson, Benjamin Quapaw, Hum-Bah-Wah-Tah, Little Greenback, See-Sah-Quapaw, and John Beaver. There are altogether forty-three Quapaw Indians with allotments where lead and zinc are being mined on the reservation. The larger incomes run from thirty thousand a year up, while the smaller royalties range from one thousand to ten thousand.

Page the poet guy who pulled the line about "Lo, the poor Indian!"

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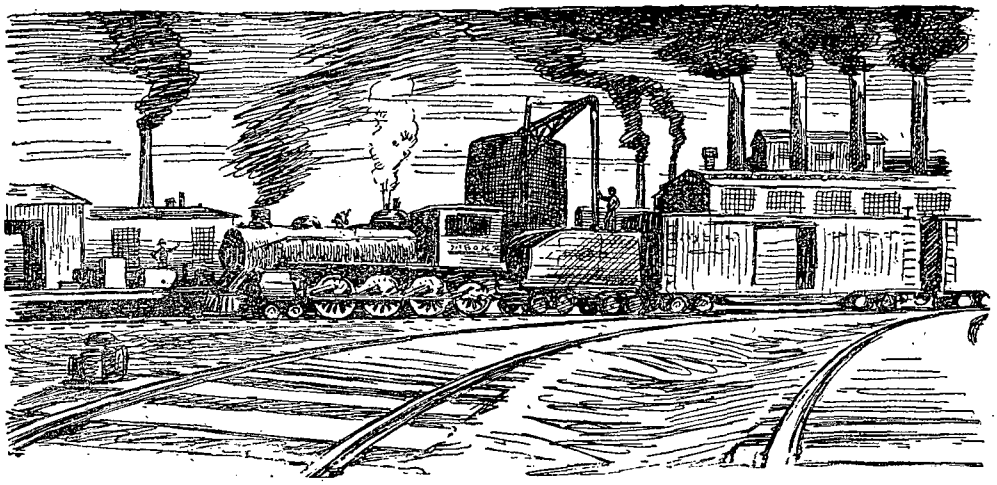

Pioneer Towns of the West

Ada, Oklahoma. By A. V. Strope

Author of "Eugene, Oregon," etc.

ALWAYS driving ahead!" The forceful phrase is a fitting slogan for the little Oklahoma city which, throughout the years since its founding, has successfully overcome so many seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Ada was named for the baby daughter of W. J. Reed, a gentleman who might be said to have embodied the idea which the slogan expresses. Mr. Reed, who was the proprietor of the general store, was ambitious to serve not only his own small community but the Federal government as well; to this end he for some time tramped the weary distance of twelve miles, carrying a heavy mail sack on his back, that Ada might have a post office.

If the establishment of the post office was the first milestone in the development of Ada, certainly the second—and perhaps the more important—was the arrival in 1900 of the Frisco Railroad. In the high hopes engendered by the completion of this link with the outside world, a new town site was plotted adjoining the village. At this time, Oklahoma had not yet been admitted to Statehood, nor had the Indian lands been apportioned; hence it was possible for the settlers to obtain titles to their holdings only from national authority. Here again we find the spirit that surmounts all difficulties, for the founders of the new town were risking serious legal involvements by this summary appropriation of land before government consent could be secured.

Lots were sold on what must seem to us a most doubtful basis. What man to-day would care to invest in a plot to which he could hold no valid title; a plot which was subject to government appraisal; a plot for which he would later be forced to pay an unknown amount of money to the original holders, the Chickasaw Indians? But while, as we have said, the new citizens did not possess clear deeds to their

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property, by common consent they banded together for law and order and the recognition of prior claim. The few attempts at lot-jumping proved futile, and the offenders, thwarted in their nefarious activities, were pleased to remember urgent business in other parts of the country. Perhaps the expressed disapproval of their methods had something to do with their abrupt departure.

As we have said before, the arrival of the Frisco Railroad was the beginning of the town's prosperity. At first, the magnate intended to make Francis, a small village ten miles north of Ada, the main point in the region. But, with the usual policy of driving ahead, the boosters of our enterprising community jumped part of the site, fenced it in, and, Winchesters in hand, guarded it against all comers. The rival claimants went to court. After two years of red tape and plodding legal proceedings, during which time Ada had attained to a size necessary to influence the railroad in its favor, the energetic citizens, their purpose accomplished, calmly decamped. The disputed territory had reverted to Francis—but the damage was done, and Francis to-day is still a village of less than a thousand inhabitants.

In 1904, a second railroad, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, reached Ada, and 1907 found the town included as well in the itinerary of the Oklahoma City-Ada-Atoka line. In 1907, too, Oklahoma was made a State and Ada was named the seat of Pontotoc County. But the fight for supremacy in east-central Oklahoma was not over. Now, with all the force of her previous endeavors and the confidence engendered by her successes, the hustling community set out to win the State normal school. Through two legislatures the battle raged, and at last the victor's crown and the much-sought prize were accorded to Ada. The institution is now the largest of its kind in the State and has an annual registration of three thousand five hundred students. For the children of the immediate vicinity, adequate educational provision is made in the two high schools and seven ward schools.

Ada has had much in the way of natural resources to contribute to its prosperity. Surrounded by rich agricultural and oil lands, with one of the greatest gas fields in the State within three miles of the city, it has a wealth of material upon which to draw. An inexhaustible supply of pure spring water is available for both domestic and industrial use. A huge electric plant furnishes light and power. For fuel, aside from the gas, there are extensive coal deposits which are easily accessible.

A glass factory, an iron foundry, a brick plant, a pickle factory, feed and flour mills, and an ice factory—all contribute their share to the financial well-being. Since 1906, Ada has also been the site of the Oklahoma Portland Cement Company, one of the largest plants of the kind west of the Mississippi, with a force of over four hundred men. Free sites for industries are located along the joint track owned by the three railroads.

In this city of eleven thousand, the business affairs are chiefly directed by the very able chamber of commerce, of which J. C. Hynds is secretary-manager.

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The Famous Killer Who-

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "The Very Outlaw He Was," etc.

THANK you, mayor!"

Sheriff Joe Cook of Monte Vista accepted the fat, black cigar with the gold band that Mayor Al Foster of Monte Vista handed him.

"I have one for "Shorty," ef he's around," said the mayor genially, pulling out a mate to the sheriff's cigar from a vest pocket.

"That gal telegrapher at the station!" exploded Sheriff Cook, savagely biting the end off of his cigar. "I knowed when the railroad put her in here that she'd be a-causin' trouble with them big blinkers of hers, an' that babylike voice she's got! Dang me, mayor, ef it ain't one thing it's another, seems, all the time! I ain't agin' wimmen in business, y'understand, mayor, but I'm agin' purty ones mixin' up business an' romance!"

Mayor Foster nodded in sympathy.

"Ah," he said politely, "an'—ef I may ask—what has the young lady telegrapher done, sheriff?"

The sheriff puffed violently on the gift cigar.

"She's sure throwed a fistful of monkey wrenches into the machinery of this office, mayor!" exclaimed Sheriff Cook.

"You ask me a minnit ago whar Shorty McKay, my deputy, was, an' I answer you by throwin' a fit over that gal telegrapher. Waal, mayor, it's got under my hide. Every minnit that I ain't got my eyes on that Shorty, he's struttin' around the railroad station, swappin' sweet words an' lovin' looks with that gal telegrapher."

"You suppose he's thar now?" asked the mayor.

"I dunno, but I suspect!" said the sheriff. "I sent him over to the Palace Feed Stable at eleven thirty, to find out about a stray hoss they've got over thar, an' I figger he had to drap by the station to see the noon train come in, an' like as not he's still thar."

The sheriff's telephone buzzed.

"Hullo?" said the sheriff, shifting his

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cigar to the far side of his mouth. "Yes—what is it? Huh, who is it speakin'? *Talk up, I kain't hear you.* Oh, yes—yes—I hear you now, ma'am—yes—the telegrapher at the station speakin'."

The mayor arched his eyebrows and cocked his head sideways.

"Yes," went on the sheriff, nodding energetically, "a telegram fer me from Sage Mound—yes—yes, it'll be all right ef you read it to me. Wait a minute until I git a pencil now."

The mayor hurriedly offered his pencil.

"Yes," went on Cook, chewing vigorously on his cigar, "Give it slow—an a little louder, please! I'll write it down. Sheriff Joe Cook, Monte Vista, Colo. Yes, I got that. Famous—yes. What? Oh, yes, killed—who—arrived—yes—your town—yes—noon train—what?—Oh, yes—period—yes—suggest entertain—yes—until—we—arrive — yes — signed—yes—Hodges—yes—Osborn—yes—Morgan—uh-huh!"

The sheriff's hand was shaking violently as the mayor leaned over his shoulder to read the remarkable message the sheriff had written out. The mayor's face blanched as he read it.

SHERIFF JOE COOK,
Monte Vista, Colorado.

Famous killer who arrived your town noon train. Suggest entertainment until we arrive.

HODGES,
OSBORN,
MORGAN.

"Lissen, miss," the sheriff was stammering, "did you—waal—happen to notice—ef—a man like that got off the train?"

"Oh, yes, sheriff," came back the soft, musical reply of the girl operator, "I particularly noticed that just one man got off the train. He went to the Lone Spruce Hotel, I think."

"Is—is my deputy, Shorty, around thar anywhars?" asked Cook. "Have you seen—er—noticed him—that is?"

"No, I haven't," the girl sang back.

The sheriff hung up the receiver.

"Who yuh reckon it is?" whispered Mayor Foster.

The sheriff picked up the message he had written out.

"I dunno," he said, candidly, "it might be "Scarface Slim" Kildare from over Ouray, but I thought he was in the pen; it might be "Gun-fanner" Smith from Big Springs—he's a bad aigg! It might be "Slippery Dell" Hanson, a right tough hombre hisself; or it might be "Greaser Tom" Romero—with a dozen notches on his cannon."

The mayor's voice trembled.

"Them signatures, sheriff," he stammered.

"Hodges is the district atorney over thar at Sage Mound," said Cook. "An' you know Osborn is mayor of Sage Mound. Morgan is the sheriff. An' them three signin' the telegram means just one thing. This hombre is wanted bad. We gotta git that feller."

The mayor raised a hand.

"Sheriff, we gotta git him—of course," said the mayor. "But we ain't got to have no shootin' scrape over it. We got fair warnin' he's a bad one. He ain't no one-man proposition. We kin call on volunteers to help git him."

The sheriff was on the verge of asking the mayor why he was butting in, but a second glance at the message caused Cook to decide that possibly, after all, Mayor Foster had the right idea. There was no sense in tackling a famous killer single-handed. No, sir! It would be well to assemble a posse of sizable proportions and then trap the desperado in such a way that he would have no chance to get his guns cracking.

"Whoever he is, he's probably kilt his man in Sage Mound," said the sheriff, an' then rid over through the butte country, probably ketchin' the train at Painted Bluffs, drappin' off here, figgerin' he had doubled back far enough to fool 'em."

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"Yes," said the mayor, licking his dry lips, "but let us postpone guessin' about him until after we has him! I won't feel right until we has him subdued, sheriff."

"We'll git some of the boys," said the sheriff.

Fifteen minutes later, after diligent telephoning on the part of the sheriff, some twenty men had assembled at the sheriff's office, all heavily armed. The sheriff explained—briefly, and the mayor had his say, cautioning care so that there would be no slip-up that might result in shooting and bloodshed.

"I believe ef we kin lure him out in the street, outa the hotel, we kin rope him by surprise," suggested the mayor.

The sheriff grunted.

"We got Jodey Bennett here to do the trick ropin'," said the sheriff, "but who is goin' to do the lurin', the nice job, Mister Mayor—that's what you got to consider—it's got to be a dang smart hombre to handle that without tippin' his hand or gittin' bumped off."

"I wish Shorty was here," said the mayor, wistfully.

"Shorty ain't smart enough fer that job, even ef he was here," said the sheriff. "Who'll volunteer?"

The silence was eloquent.

"Very well," said the mayor, quietly. "I'll git him out, an' you boys do the rest!"

"You git him out at your own risk, mayor," said the sheriff, "an' then step quickly away from him so Jodey Bennett kin rope him. We kin fire a few shots over his haid to pacify him—an' by that time he'll know the jig's up with him!"

So the crowd adjourned to Pecos Street and scattered around the Lone Spruce Hotel. Jodey Bennett, the best trick roper in the San Luis Valley, took station just around the corner from the main entrance to the hotel. The sheriff, a sawed-off shotgun under his arm, planted himself directly across from the hotel entrance, behind a sign board which offered the twin merits of some secrecy and some security. The rest of the boys stepped into doorways or loitered at the curbs, their guns in hand under their coats or under folded arms. Mayor Al Foster lurched across the street.

So quietly had the posse arrived and taken position that no one on the street had noticed anything unusual. The hotel lobby was practically deserted when the mayor stumbled in, brave at heart but irresolute at the knees. He made for the desk, aware that his gait was shaky and uncertain. The clerk, listening to his whisper, suddenly drew back as though a rattlesnake had struck at his face.

"What?" he exclaimed.

"The man who came in on the noon train!" repeated the mayor in a hoarse whisper, "is Scarface Joe or Gunslingin' Pete or something like that—a famous murderer—an'—would you please—kindly point him out to—to—to me?"

The clerk's eyes looked like marbles protruding from his head. He tried to speak, choked, and then pointed guardedly.

"Er—him?" asked the mayor.

The clerk nodded, mutely.

The mayor looked at the short, stockily built gentleman sitting on the lounge near the front window. The man did not resemble the typical murderer as the mayor had pictured him. He was not in cowboy clothes. Instead he wore a brown derby and a suit of checked store clothes. He was husky, however, and appeared able to put up a good fight with his fists.

The mayor wabbled toward him.

"Excuse me, brother," said the mayor, touching his man on the arm, with deference, "I am the mayor here—an'—would you—honor—honor—me—if we took a look at our—our scenery outside, perhaps?"

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The man's jaw dropped.

"Outside—outdoors," said Mayor Foster, trying to smile.

The man took off his derby and scratched his head.

"Are you coo-coo, brother?" he asked, kindly, "or am I? I don't git you at all, but I'll step out with you."

They went out at once—the mayor staggering slightly, but still game.

A shrill whistle sounded. That was the sheriff's signal to Jodey Bennett to get ready with his rope. But the killer was not yet far enough out in the street to give Jodey a chance.

"Over here," said the mayor, smiling weakly, "ef you please. Really, our scenery—mountains, mountains—an'—an'—a very fine climate."

The man in the derby stepped toward the beckoning mayor.

Two shrill whistles; that meant the throw, from Bennett. The mayor, his face chalky, tried to leap away, but his feet seemed rooted to the spot.

Jodey had made a perfect catch!

"What the heck!" screamed the stranger, as the rope slipped down and tightened over his arms and likewise around the quivering form of Mayor Foster. Immediately there was a volley of shots, and while the stranger cringed a bit at the unexpected fusillade, it was the mayor who yelled:

"I'm here!" he cried. "Don't shoot *me!*"

The stranger appeared dazed for only a minute. Then, with a wild cry about "lunatics," he seized Foster by the shoulders and attempted to force him down through the hemp loop as a prelude to escape himself. He did not know who the men were with the guns. He struggled mightily, despite the feeble cries of the mayor, but at the moment that he had forced the mayor to his knees and had the rope up, almost over the mayor's head, a man on horseback dashed around the corner, circled half way once; and the lariat suddenly tightened with tremendous pressure, yanking the stranger off his feet so that he somersaulted over the mayor. Both rolled over and over in the street, like two fighting bulldogs.

The mayor did his part. He yelled lustily. But the stranger, muttering his astonishment, jerked the mayor up, and then, with an almost superhuman effort, wiggled out of the noose and lurched for Bennett. He pulled that gentleman from his horse so fast that Bennett thought a tornado had struck him. Then, using Bennett as a shield, and lifting the cowboy right off his feet, the stranger rushed the sheriff, closed with him, and obtained possession of the shotgun in jig order.

Instantly the street cleared, as if by magic.

The stranger, whirling around dizzily, seemed to be attempting to cover all points of the compass at once, but his tormentors appeared to have vanished. Only the mayor, entangled in Jodey Bennett's lariat, remained, and he was sitting comfortably in the dust, massaging his forehead and mumbling in a dazed sort of way. The sheriff and Jodey Bennett and Jodey Bennett's horse were all three crowded between two buildings. Others of the posse were here and there, wherever they had found refuge. But the stranger, handling the sawed-off shotgun most recklessly, held the fort.

"Your ropin'," gasped the sheriff to Bennett, "was most scandalous!"

"We're in fer it now, plenty!" said Cook uneasily, "I don't recognize that hombre as any of th' outlaws I knows."

"Say," cried Bennett, "look who is comin'!"

Up the street came the girl telegrapher. Hands reached out from between buildings, attempting to detain her, and hoarse warnings were hissed at her, en route, but she paid no heed. In the middle of the street, however, she saw one man with a shotgun and

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another man rubbing his head. She ran out impulsively and laid a hand on the arm of the man with the gun, and groans and sighs echoed from all sides, where the posse waited.

Instantly heads popped out on all sides.

"That gal telegrapher!" exclaimed the sheriff, excitedly. "She's got spunk, brains, good, ol'-fashioned nerve!"

A figure loomed up beside the sheriff.

"Hullo, boss," it said, "I been lookin' fer you over to the office. I got a message fer you. It was phoned up."

"That gal telegrapher!" gasped the sheriff. "I hand it to her, Shorty. I take back all I ever said! Why, fer out an' out bravery, she jus' takes the cake!"

"Thanks!" said Shorty, fidgeting.

And then, before any one thought of rushing to the girl's assistance, a cavalcade of horsemen swept up the street. There were Hodges and Osborn and Morgan and other leading citizens of Sage Mound. The girl waved them down. They tumbled off sweating horses and crowded around, and it was then that the sheriff remembered the telegram Shorty had thrust into his hand. He read it swiftly, to utter a wild cry of mingled grief and rage. He shoved the telegram at Bennett.

"Read that!" he howled.

Bennett read it. It said:

SHERIFF JOE COOK,
Monte Vista, Colorado.

Famous Miller New arrived your town noon train. Suggest entertainment until we arrive.

HODGES,
OSBORN,
MORGAN.

"Miller New, the famous wrestler!" cried Bennett, his eyes bulging. "The bird that is goin' to wrestle at Sage Mound to-night!"

"Miller New!" whooped the sheriff, frantically. "An' when that baby-voiced, afraid-to-speak-up woman telephoned me, I thought she said 'famous killer who' instead of 'famous Miller New!'"

"Explain," said Bennett, shrugging his shoulders.

So the perspiring sheriff rushed out toward the group in the street, where the mighty Miller New, famed wrestler, was loudly complaining about the treatment he had received by a gang of thugs and maniacs. The Sage Mound bunch were voicing angry exclamations, and a storm seemed brewing.

"That gal telegrapher," began Sheriff Cook, wildly.

"That gal telegrapher," repeated Mr. New, in stentorian tones, "was the only sane person in this burg. She come right out an' asked me what the trouble was, an' when I told her who I was everything was lovely. Ef it hadn't been fer her I'd still be out here gettin' shot at, I reckon, by a lot of——"

"That gal telegrapher," cried the sheriff, desperately.

"Lissen, gents," broke in Shorty, with a roar, "my boss, the sheriff, is only tryin' to tell you how brave he thinks the little woman is. He just told me back thar on the sidewalk. He gives her credit! An' as fer this awful mixup about Mr. New—I reckon we're all sorry. But I invite every one o' you Sage Mound gents to our weddin'——"

"That gal telegrapher!" roared the sheriff, once more, but again he was interrupted. The mighty Miller New broke into a smile and at that the Sage Mound boys sent up a friendly yell, while they waved their hats and beamed on the girl and Shorty.

"That's right, sheriff!" they whooped in cordial tones, though perhaps in error. "We're for her, too—hooray fer that gal telegrapher of ol' Monte Vista!"

And the sheriff, speechless, sat down beside the spechless mayor, who was still rubbing his forehead in a dazed sort of way.

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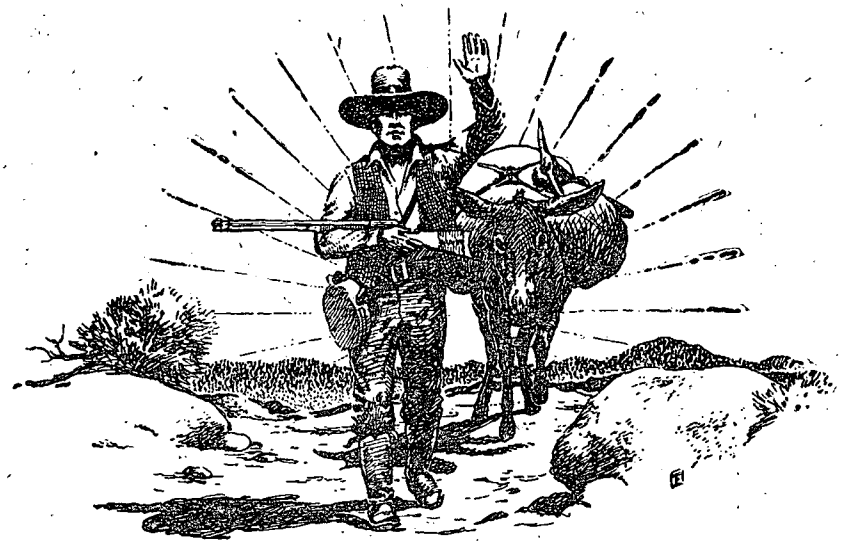

Miner's Potlatch

By J. A. Thompson

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE desires this department to be of real assistance to all who are interested in the practical side of mining. Questions pertaining to field conditions, mining equipment, mining territories, mining laws, prospecting and general geology will be answered.

Address all communications to J. A. Thompson, mining expert, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

FROM all sections of the country have come questions relative to the much discussed use of the divining rod in locating gold, silver or other minerals. Some of the correspondents want to know what they are and how to use them. Without questioning its validity, they seek only the method and manner of "witching for gold." Others, more skeptical, ask, "Is there anything to it?"

To that latter question, this writer unhesitatingly answers, "No." And his opinion is backed by that of no less an authority than the United States geological survey, which some time ago issued an intensely interesting pamphlet on the subject. The pamphlet was prefaced by a short introduction in which is was stated that to all who write, or have written to the Survey on the question, their advice has been to invest no money in any such contrivance as a so-called divining rod, or pay any one fees for "witching for gold."

The use of a forked twig or divining rod in finding mineral deposits, locating well sites, or determining the depth at which ore occurs, is a persistent superstition which dates back at least as far as the sixteenth century in works written on the subject, and into early antiquity as far as legends are concerned.

The divining rod has flourished in many forms, but the most common form is that of a forked twig. In

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manipulating it, one fork is held in each hand with the butt pointing vertically upward. According to the theory, when the forked twig is carried to a place beneath which water or minerals lie, the butt end swings into a downward position.

The ease with which swindlers and frauds can manipulate such a device to their own ends is too obvious for explanation. A simple relaxation of the pressure by which the twig is held in the hands, and the butt end falls down. According to some diviners the butt end not only falls down when a mineral zone is approached, it twirls round and round. But this is a harder trick, so most manipulators have contented themselves and their dupes with simply letting the butt end fall when the supposed mineral deposit is close.

Opinions have differed widely on the kinds of wood to use in making a divining rod. The favorites seem to be peach, willow, hazel, and witch-hazel. There are multitudinous forms too. Though the forked twig already described has always been the most popular, there are straight twigs held between thumb and forefinger, with the heavy or bob end down. At the approach of the divining rod to ore, the bob end moves up and down. Sometimes it is claimed that the number of swings up and down indicate the depth to ore or water.

Yet neither the styles nor the methods of using the divining rod are more varied than the uses which have been claimed for it. A partial list is given here:

1. Locate ore deposits.
2. Locate buried or hidden treasure.
3. Locate lost landmarks and reestablish boundary lines.
4. Detect criminals.
5. Analyze character.
6. Trace lost or stolen animals.
7. Trace underground streams.
8. Determine depth at which ore or water occurs.
9. Analyze ores.
10. Cure diseases.

After all, the forked hazel twig as a locator of mineral is simply an adaptation of the magic wand of the conjurer. And its mysteries are always and have always been explained by the latest development in contemporary science. For instance, modern explanations that attempt a scientific basis for the divining rod claim that it derives its efficacy from radio-activity, psychic phenomena or some such source of which little is yet known. Countless numbers of books and pamphlets have been issued on the subject since the first work on witching for minerals appeared in 1556, by Georgius Agricola.

In summing up the situation the United States geological survey has this to say, "If any genuine instrument were invented, its merits would no doubt establish it above controversy, as have the merits of other real inventions. Though not all users are intentional deceivers and some of good character and honest faith may 'witch for minerals.' However, as anything that can be veiled in mystery afford a good opportunity for swindlers, there can be no doubt that the majority of the large group of professional finders of water, oil, or other mineral who take pay for their services or the sale of instruments are deliberately defrauding the people."

Here's a letter from Gus Smiley, Wichita, Kansas, which, while not strictly scientific, asks an important question, the answer to which should be of interest to any one contemplating a long trip for prospecting or other purposes into the desert lands of the West:

"How," asks Gus, "when water is so scarce does a fellow ever get a chance to grab off his regular Saturday night bath?"

The answer, with which many a des-

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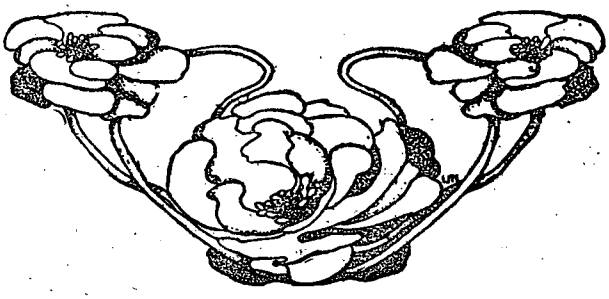
ert rat will be ready to come back, is, when water is too scarce to be available for bathing purposes, try a sand rub, which, if taken properly, will be found not only cleansing but refreshing. Just a word of advice should be given in connection with the sand rub: Take it at the bottom of a gully where the sand is finest and cleanest.

To J. V. B., Fresno, California: Four new development companies have been reported operating in the Katherine district, Mojave County, Arizona. The Katherine mine is reported to have struck high grade gold ore about two hundred feet east of where entry was made into the large ore shoot on the two-hundred-foot level. This strike added materially to the ore reserves of the mine and inspired an increased interest in the district. The Comstock Silver Mining Company operating at Stockton Hill, eleven miles north of Kingman, drifted forty feet, along the Banner vein on the two-hundred-and-fifty-foot level. Both faces of the drift, which was driven each way from where the vein was crosscut, were reported to be in ore. The Big Jim and the United Eastern mines have opened, attracting much interest to Oatman. The Western Apex ore body on the seven-hundred-foot level was reported to be thirty feet wide in the east drift last September.

To N. L., White River Junction, Vermont: In a recent report of the Federal Trade Commission on national wealth, the copper ore reserves of the United States owned by one hundred and thirty-eight companies were placed at one billion, five hundred and eighty-eight million tons. Based on an annual production of forty-five million tons of copper ore, the supply will last forty years.



MORE ROADS FOR GRAND CAÑON

WORK is being carried on whenever practicable for the improvement of the trails in the Grand Cañon of Arizona. One of the latest developments of this kind is the paving with asphalt of the road along the rim from El Tovar Hotel to Grand View and Desert View. This road affords a fine view of the cañon, the Painted Desert and other marvels of the region.

Other projected improvements in the way of road construction are covered by a contract recently awarded to James Vallandingham, of Salt Lake City, for the building of fourteen miles of road at a cost of a little over a quarter of a million dollars. The government has reserved the right to increase or decrease the mileage so that the amount spent shall not exceed the funds available. The construction is to be completed within three hundred working days, following ten days after the contractor receives formal notice to begin operations.

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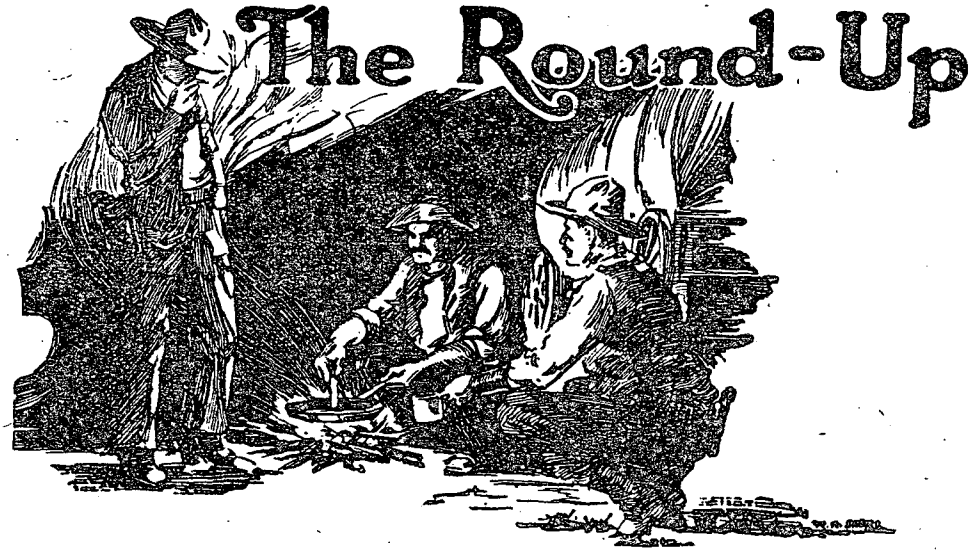

YOU folks are always so kind and patient with the Old Man that he sure hates to intrude too much. Frankly, though, he is kind of all set up recently about the magazine—the particularly crackin' good stories the authors are turnin' out. How about the two serials, "Redwood and Gold," by Jackson Gregory, and "The Western Double," by George Owen Baxter? Say, bo, but they're there. And jest wait till you read "Arizona Sweet," by Clem Yore, in next week's issue. Also, Peg Leg fans will cheer, for the old sheriff will be there, too. And—but we've already said enough. Time!

Now let's hear some of the folks:

Bill Reno, who is ridin' with 73 Ranch, Atlantic City, Wyoming, feels this way about learnin' a horse to do his stuff properly.

"DEAR BOSS AND WADDIES: I am a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and I always read the Round-up. I have leaned back against my saddle and heard all of you argue about horses and the breaking of them. Now I am a bronc fighter by profession—that is, I break horses for a living, and I find that the quickest way is to get a horse's attention.

"The first thing that a horse learns he always remembers, and you have got to show him that you are boss. I use a war bridle. Some readers may not know what this is, so I will explain. I have a soft cotton rope with a loop on one end just big enough to go over his lower jaw. Then I put the rope over his head and through the loop on the lower jaw, so it comes on the left side. I use a rope about forty feet long. That gives plenty of rope to hold to. When he is broke to lead—and I tell you that they lead when I get through with them—I put a hackamore and bridle on them. I use a full spade bit. I never have turned over a horse yet that was a bucker, and that's more than a lot of hackamore pealers can say."

No one has been spouting any poetry around here in a dog's age, but Mrs. C. F. Bishop, P. O. Box 111, Sparks, Nevada, has writ up something nice, and she is goin' to give it to us.

"I've broke my trail through eternal snow,
In the land of the northern lights.
I've heard the voice of the big wolf packs,
As they raced through the frost-bound nights.

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"I've searched in the graveled creeks for gold
And I've panned with the utmost care,
And sometimes I've made a little strike;
But, I spent it, as soon, up there.

"I've trailed for days on my webbed snow-shoes,
As I followed my long trap lines.
I learned to look with true lover's eyes
On the firs, the spruce, and the pines.

"I've lost my trail 'neath the desert sun;
'Mongst the blazing rocks and the sands.
And I've thrown a dry canteen away
While I dreamed of clear, watered lands.

"I've ridden, too, with the big trail herds.
I've lived on the chuck-wagon chow.
I argued once, but I lost the point,
With a longhorned Texas cow.

"I've known the thundering big stampede,
'Cause I rode in its wild vanguard,
And trusted to luck and four sure feet,
The feet of my big pinto 'Pard.'

"I've trailed through seas of the silver sage
Where it met the horizon's blue.
I've tramped all trails in this dear old West;
'Though old, yet it always seems new.

"Just rambling around for rambling's sake.
Sometimes I have trailed a quarry,
Till I wonder where I'll ramble next
In that good old WESTERN STORY."

Old boy Max Brand, will sure be pleased with this.

"MR. EDITOR: Please hog tie and brand Max Brand so he won't get away. I have read and reread his story, 'Canyon Coward,' and it is the best I ever saw. I have been reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for over ten years, and that story has them all shot up. Come again, Brand; come quick and in every issue. Do not lay down on us, for if you do, we will rope you and hog tie you, but not gag you, for we want to hear from you some more. Some are, I notice, squealing for to cut out Western stories. I say shoot them out. Western stories are interesting. I am an ex-cowboy. For thirty-seven years I have been in Texas, Arizona and Wyoming, and I know how to appreciate a good story. If a lot of those hombres had forked a bronc as long as I have, they would not squeal about Western stories.

"George W. Gordon."

From down East, none other than a "Gangster from Maine," comes loping up to the fire. He has a couple of questions to ask. We'll try to answer them ourselves, bein' as how we feel they are plumb easy. Interrogate, Gangster.

"Well, boys, I've been listenin' to the discussions on horseflesh quite a spell, and would like to ask a question or two. I reckon some of you frog-legged cow waddies will be able to answer them without putting you out too much.

"First: In measuring a horse's height by so many hands, as it goes, what section of the horse's body is taken in, at the hind legs up over the rump, or the forelegs up over the shoulders?

"Second: How is the hand held while measuring? From thumb to little finger outstretched, or over and over, fingers closed?

"What is supposed to be the best height for a good saddle horse at maturity? I am asking these questions, for I'm some interested in horses myself, and the Round-up is the place to ask them, I reckon. So long."

Now for the answers, Gangsters. Answer to No. 1: Stand your horse up straight, front feet together, hind feet together, and measure him from where his front feet touch the ground straight up to the top of his withers. This is generally done with what is known as a standard, which is a straight stick with an arm on it which can be pushed up and down, similar to that device which is used for measuring men in gymnasiums.

No. 2: A hand is four inches just as a foot is twelve inches. In other

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words, it is an arbitrary and definite number of inches. Thus, when you say a man is five feet tall, it is another way of saying that he is sixty inches tall. So when you say a horse is fifteen hands in height, it is another way of saying he is sixty inches high, measuring from the sole of his front feet, up over his shoulder to the top of his withers.

Now, as to the proper height of a saddle horse. This is largely a question of taste. Western ponies run from about fourteen to fifteen hands. Indian ponies run even smaller, some of them less than fourteen hands. The weight-carrying ability of a horse doesn't depend only on its size, but you ask especially about a saddle horse. A saddle horse is a type of horse. When you say saddle horse to the average horseman, he thinks of the Kentucky saddle horses—not that cracking good ones are not raised in Virginia, Missouri and other sections. These saddle horses run an average of about fifteen and two tenths hands. Personally, we like a small horse. We're light and not overly large, and therefore there is no use in feeding the big ones. Of course, it costs a lot more to feed a big horse than a little one. Our fifteen-hand horse will keep on half of what the fifteen and two tenths to seventeen hunter and work horse will keep on, and so, brother Gangster, the size of your horse is largely a matter of your taste. Of course, if you are a big man you would look absurd on a little animal. On the contrary, if you are a small man, you will look well on a big horse, or on a little one.

THE WEST

And What Do YOU Know About It?

Here is a chance to test, and, at the same time, increase your knowledge of the West. Take these questions now, one at a time, and write your answers down during the coming week. In the next issue, right here, at the bottom of the last page of the Round-up, you'll find all of the questions in this week's issue correctly answered. Compare your answers with the right ones and mark yourself accordingly. If you have read your WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE with care during the past years, you should have little trouble in getting mighty good marks on these questions, for nearly all of them are based on information given in articles and stories that have been printed in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Then get your best-thinking Stetson on, your pencil out, and go to it.

More questions next week.

1. What grain contains more oil than any other?..... 2. Which State calls the sunflower its own?..... 3. Old Sol shines so brightly on New Mexico that it is called the.....State. 4. The apple blossom is the State flower of..... 5. The highest and steepest mountain range in the United States is the..... 6. The coast State which furnishes most of our raisins is..... 7. The largest trout in the world make their home in the.....River, Oregon. 8. Discovery of a.....mine proved to be a boom in Spokane, Washington, in 1885. 9. After which beloved United States President was the capital of Nebraska named?..... 10. Where is the world's chief whaling port?.....

Answers to last week's questions. 1. Omaha. 2. Kansas. 3. Cactus. 4. Kit Carson. 5. Mojave. 6. Gold. 7. Ten days. 8. Texas. 9. Bellingham, Washington. 10. Nebraska.

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Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

NEXT week brings the first of April to us, and the Old Holla will soon look like a young tree again. It's time, folks, to decide what you're going to do on your summer's vacation. Yes, I know it seems early to you, but if your request doesn't get into the Old Holla within the next fortnight, it'll be too late to plan anything but a belated fall trip. The seasons spin around pretty fast, and we have to be ready for each before it comes.

Here's a hombre who's got the right idea about speaking his little piece early:

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: I belong to a breed of hombres called the trail stompers, dust kickers, tramp cow waddies, perambulatin' punchers, and numerous other sobriquets, and never known to be worth a busted riggin' ring for anything. All we do is work all winter and travel all summer, by horseback, with one or two pack horses or mules. All we own is the hosses, saddle, a six-shooter, .30-30 rifle, and camp outfit. But added to that is good health and a clear conscience, so little yet so much!

Now, Gang, here is one hombre, subject to all or at least two of the above names, who has some ambition to be called something else for a change, so from now on I'm going to be a "trail doctor." Why? Because instead of being so blamed selfish with my travels and outfits, this year when I start out I'm going to offer my experience, outfit, and services to some unfortunate brother or brothers—not more than three, to spend the summer with me on the trail. Some one who has "lungs," or other ailments that life in the open will cure. I'm going to let them choose the route, and, in short, "be boss."

And so, companieros de las lunas, why not follow my lead and get together? I, for one, am plumb tired of this lone-wolf stuff. Hombres, any one of you as can get a saddle, bridle, and riding gear, and can pay part of the check bill, let's hear from you. I've got all the horses and trail stuff we need.

TRAIL DOCTOR.

Care of The Tree.

A real live author is with us, folks!

DEAR GANG: I hail from Missouri, and as I've been no farther West than the mentioned State, said West is a place of great interest to me. I write a story when the notion strikes me, and this spring I'm going to mush West. That's why I've dropped in on you hombres. I know there are a bunch of you who can tell me more about the West in half an hour than I could learn by experience in a year.

Besides wanting to hear from a gang of cow-punchers, I'm writing this letter to tell

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you what a darned good magazine WESTERN STORY is.

Now, all who want to hear from a writer, who wants to hear from some real cowboys, just sit down and write me pronto. I'm known around here as "Mack," or "Red," but you boys had better call me "Tenderfoot."

W. R. MOORE.

Box 175, Fulton, Missouri.

Texas has been appearin' quite frequently in the Old Holla these days. We're sure pleased.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've enjoyed The Hollow Tree many, many moons, but never butted in before. Now, I just can't stay away no mo'. Folks, I'm wanting some old cowboy and outlaw ballads in exchange for "Utah Carrol," "Texas Ranger," "Dying Cowboy," "When the Leaves Were Drifting Down," and lots of others. These are some of the songs I want: "Sam Bass," "Jesse James," "When The Work Is Done This Fall," "Tom Sherman's Barroom," "I'll See You Next Fall," and "Call Me Back, Pal o' Mine."

I've traveled all over Texas, my birth State, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, New Mexico, and part of Colorado. I'm twenty-four years old and part Comanche Indian and part Spanish. Have lived in camps for the past ten years. I play a guitar, harp, banjo, violin, and anything else that is played with strings.

Folks, I'll expect to hear from you.

ESTELYNE STOUARD.

General Delivery, Burkburnett, Texas.

"I'm a member of the 115th Field Artillery, Tennessee National Guards," writes Alton Claxton, Route 2, Bellbuckle, Tennessee. Private Claxton can tell about Camp Jackson, and will especially welcome letters from national guardsmen the country over.

A United States marine.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I wonder if you'll let a lonely marine join your happy crowd. I can give information about the West Indies, Cuba, Haiti, Panama City, Honolulu, Hawaii, Japan, China, Guam, and the Philippine Islands. I came from the Lone Star State, Texas, folks, so let's hear you cheer!

S. L. KING, U. S. M. C.

Company A, Barracks 90, M. B. Naval Station, Cavite, Philippine Islands.

"I live in the Panhandle, near the oil fields," writes Alvin Kennedy, Box 76, Lelia Lake, Texas. This Gangster would especially like to have young fellows of about twenty-three, who live in San Francisco, California, write him.

Carl S. Parker, 10 Chapman Street, Binghamton, New York, wants to be a very active member of the Old Holla. He's a musician, so we'll expect all you Gangsters who can read notes, to get in touch with him.

"I'm proud of my Hollow Tree button, because back of it stands The Hollow Tree Gang," says C. B. Ayres, of Oakland, California.

Don't you want to let folks know that you belong to one of the best friendship clubs in the world?

Send twenty-five cents in stamps or coin to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, and state whether you want the button style for your coat lapel, or the pin.

From distant New Zealand comes a tribute to one of our most-admired sisters. "Under the stimulus of Sola's appeal for a friend," says Akarana, "I follow suit with my humble contribution in the hope that it may stir in some kindly soul a responsive feeling of sympathy for one in far-away New Zealand. It is just possible that some of you Americans were in the great fleet which visited these shores, and you would likely feel a little interest in one of the residents of this city who warmly welcomed the splendid men and ships of Uncle Sam."

Akarana's poem has been written for all of you loyal hombres. Here it is:

I, too, like Sola, want a friend
With hand to grip across the sea.
Nor seek perfection. Let him be
Just this—a truth-and-honor blend.

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I want that one to prove the name
Is pure as is a leaping flame.

I want a *friend*—that word mark well,
Mark its significance. It shows
The gold of heart that ever glows
In him we call a *man!* We tell
God's best—unsullied to the end—
Where worth reveals the genuine friend.
Where'er he be, my heart is told,
That man will gladly take my hand,
Will cheer a brooding soul whose sand
Is running low, for he is old.
Yet, how can I keep such a thought,
Since age to many is but naught?

Bereft of brother, wife, and boy,
Apart, like lonely, dying tree,
I find no solace here. For me
Somber is life; there is no joy!
Can I, then, 'mong your noble hills
Win friendship in a hand that thrills?

AKARANA.

Care of The Tree.

I 'pect the rough-ridin' hombres will be glad to see a letter from one of 'em, from Shoshone, Idaho.

DEAR GANG: I'm running a stock ranch a few miles from Shoshone. Although I run some range cattle, I raise quite a number of dairy cows and a large number of turkeys. Maybe that don't sound so excitin', folks, but just the same I'm the hombre as can tell any one who wants to know, about cowboys, sheep-herders, and outlaws. I've lived among them all my life. Now I'll bet I've got you hombres all curious, haven't I?

I live within a day's drive of a number of quite noted places—for instance, the Shoshone Falls, where Snake River takes a desperate jump of over two hundred feet! And the Thousand Springs, where a whole river comes out of the rocks and forms the Malade River. The Shoshone Ice Cave is fifteen miles from here. You can wear an overcoat on the hottest day in summer there. The Crater of the Moon is seventy miles from Shoshone, and you can walk miles on solid lava rock. There are lions, coyotes, bobcats, and foxes among these rocks. Trappers make big money catching them.

Now, if any one wants to know more of this country, let him write! W. L. GARDNER.

Shoshone, Idaho.

"We are twenty-year-old twins wishing to get letters from everywhere," say Esther E. and Rachel R. Carter. Address these Gangsters at Richmond, Maine.

From "Ioway."

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live in the wonderful State of Ioway, near the Mississippi River. I desire greatly to correspond with a girl my own age, which is twenty-three, from any of the Western States. I'm a lover of sports, and my chief hobby is horseback riding. I promise to make an interesting correspondent.

LONELY IOWAY.

Care of The Tree.

From Humboldt County, California.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My husband and baby and I live on a seven-hundred-acre ranch in Humboldt County. Our place is situated in a cañon, with a large creek running through it. It is indeed a very beautiful spot. Although my husband was suffering from a nervous breakdown when we came here, a little over a year ago, he is quite vigorous now, and we both love the hard work that we have to do here, for it keeps us strong and well.

I can answer most questions about Humboldt County, as I was born and raised in Eureka, on Humboldt Bay. MRS. E. GIRARD.

Bayside, Humboldt County, California.

Missourians, I'll hold you responsible for the filling of this Gangster's mail box.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have had forty acres of land left to me near Springfield, Missouri, and I am planning to take my family of nine down there in the spring. I am told that twenty-five acres of the land is tilled soil, and that the whole tract is two miles from White River, in Taney County.

What I want to know is whether or not a man with a good-sized family like mine can make a living down there. Will you folks who can give me some information, come forward, please? H. KOHLER.

3627 Hartman Avenue, Omaha, Nebraska.

"I'm looking for a pal—one who would like to go in the springtime from place to place in a cheap car," says J. Mc., in care of The Tree. J. Mc. isn't so young, and would prefer a pal around fifty or a little over.

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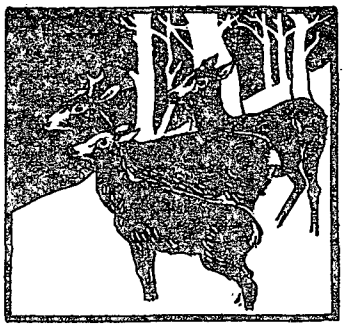
Puzzling Trails

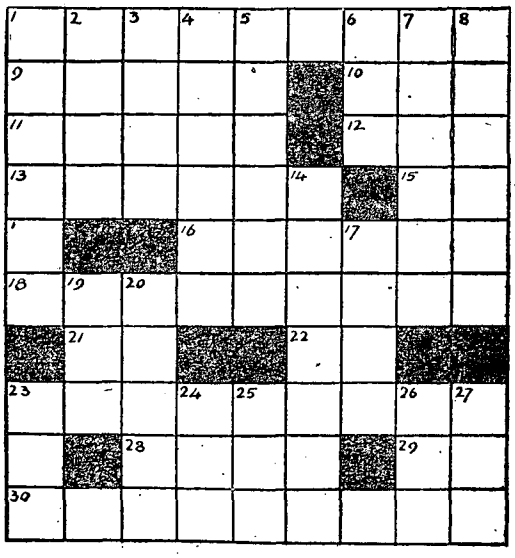
By *Prosper Buranelli*

EFDM DHB BFFM, QNDQ
TL QNF ZTHB VP ADJF
QV AFQ. NFMF AVFL.



After the Round-up is over, each week Prosper Buranelli will select for readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE a couple of tricky problems that will make them get out their pencils and go to it. What kind of puzzle do you like the best? Write and tell us. Send in a puzzle and show us. Maybe you can concoct the one that will make WESTERN STORY readers quit cold.

HERE'S slipping you a little Wild West in a crossword puzzle," writes George Adams of San Antonio, Texas. And he proceeds to give us a neat construction featuring WESTERN STORY terms.



Horizontal

1—Mexican for scrub thicket.
9—biblical character.
10—to the (Italian).
11—what cowboys wear.
12—for.
13—placed on a kind of common support.
15—one hundred and one.
16—region of Northwest.
18—most tempestuous.
21—thus (abbr.).
22—French article.
23—cuttings out.
28—Irish language.
29—prefix meaning down.
30—made good, garbed again.

Vertical

1—Southwestern plant.
2—laughter.
3—Asiatic.

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4—northern tree.
5—name of famous Medieval saint.
6—strike.
7—man's nickname (pl.)
8—familiar cowboy implement.
14—newspapers.
17—perceived.
19—mount.
20—gazed leeringly.
23—the (German).
24—mistake.
25—syllable which in duplicate means African fly.
26—exclamation.
27—earth.

And now you can take up the illustrated cryptogram at the head of the department. The picture stands for a word. Guess the word, and you will find it in the cipher. That will give you a start. Fill in the letters you have thus found the meaning of, and go ahead.

F. L. Jones of Chicago sends in a cipher of his own. You won't find it so hard.

BMY XZDUCYG, VG KA BMY CVGB JZNX ZS BMKG TDRRCY MKCT AZB V CKBBCY.

Can you figure it out? If not, wait till next week and see how you should have gone about it.

Last week's answers:

Cryptograms

GET YOUR HORSE AND GUN, THEN AWAY OUT HUNTING OVER THE PLAINS.

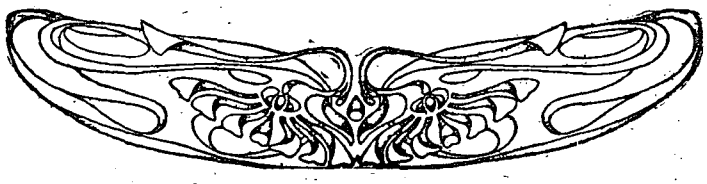
The picture signified horse, and there was no other five-letter word in the cipher. That gave you O-ER, which couldn't have been much else but OVER. Then you had -HE, and you could figure that out to be THE. The rest should have worked out easily enough.

WATCH FOR SINGLE LETTERS IN A CIPHER. THEY ARE THE FIRST GIVE AWAY CLUE.

That pretty much tells it. The single letter word was either A or I. If it was I then the next to the last word took this form: I-I-. That might have been IRIS or some other unfamiliar word. But if the single letter word was A, then you had A-A-, and the common word AWAY suggested itself. ARE should have attracted attention next, along with THE and THEY.

Crossword puzzle:

C	O	M	A	N	C	H	E	S
O	P	U	S		A	E	R	O
W	A	L	L	S		P	A	L
P	L	E	A	T	S		S	O
U		S	N	A	I	L		S
N	C		T	I	D	E	S	
C	O	S		R	E	D		S
H	O	P	I		S		F	A
E	L	I	T	E		R	E	S
R	I	T	E		A	I	L	S
S	E	E	M	I	N	G	L	Y



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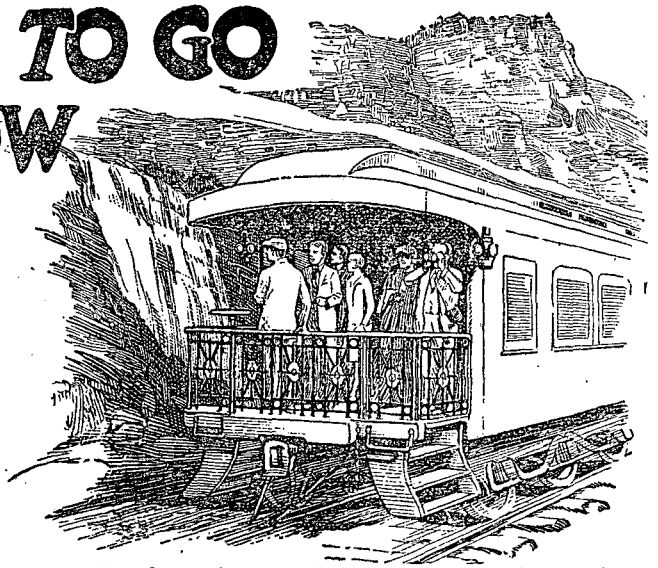
WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE



by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

RIVERS OF THE NORTHWEST—THE ATHABASKA BASIN

THE climate of a country is an important factor in determining a place of residence, and when this suits the taste of the settler it makes up for numerous drawbacks. A delightful climate is not necessarily one that is made up entirely of warm weather, but one that is free from sudden fluctuations. It is a well-known fact that the most vigorous and the hardest-working individuals of the human race are those that live in places where the heat is not sufficient to render them torpid and lazy, and where the cold weather is not so severe and lasting as to require all their time to provide the necessities of life.

While the climate of the Athabaska Basin may not be ideal in this respect, it does possess many delightful characteristics. When the weather turns cold in the fall it remains cold until the following spring, and one knows just what to expect. Wind storms during this period are rare. In summer the days are warm, but the nights, even in the hottest periods, are cool and refreshing. This tends to promote vigorous growth in both the animal and the vegetable world.

The fur-bearing animals of northern Alberta are also furnished with a heavy coat as a protection against the cold winter, which renders the fur products of this area among the finest and most valuable in the world. Besides the Athabaska River itself, which we went over in last week's article, there are numerous rivers and lakes in this region which furnish a plentiful and permanent supply of the principal article of diet, for without fish the district would be almost uninhabitable.

Game is abundant here, both large and small. Moose, wood buffalo, caribou, timber wolves and bears are among the larger game, while almost all the smaller fur-bearing animals are found in this region.

The wood buffalo are a sub-species of those that roamed the great central plain as far south as Louisiana. They

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are larger and darker than the typical plains species, with hair more dense and silky and the horns more slender and incurved. Black bears are fairly common in the Athabaska Valley. They are quite harmless and will flee from human beings. They live chiefly on blueberries, which grow in abundance in the marshes and muskegs. A bear is not an unusual pet with both the white and the Indian children of this section. The beaver, which was formerly here in immense numbers, is now almost exterminated in many parts, and nowhere is common, although a few pelts are received by most of the posts annually.

The deltas of Peace and Athabaska Rivers, at the west end of Lake Athabaska, are favorite trapping grounds in early winter. Foxes are attracted to this locality by the large numbers of wounded ducks and geese which escape during the fall hunt and are dug out of the snow in winter by the foxes.

The settlements of the northern region are scattered and consist of trading posts established by the fur companies, with a few houses to accommodate the factor and his assistants. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have barracks at a great many of these centers to preserve order and enforce the law in the district. The first post established in the northern region was located on Athabaska River about forty miles above the lake. It seems never to have had a distinctive name but was called "Old Establishment," and was founded about 1778 by Peter Pond, a trader of the Northwest Company. In 1789 it was removed by Roderick McKenzie to Old Fort Point, on Lake Athabaska, about eight miles west of the mouth of the river, and was renamed Chipewyan. It was from this point that Alexander MacKenzie, in 1789 set out on the exploration of the river that bears his name.

There are a number of Hudson's Bay Company posts here to which the Indians bring their pelts and trade them for ammunition and other goods.

As the life of the white inhabitants north of Lake Athabaska is closely bound up with the waterway of the great river system, the opening and closing of navigation on these waterways are the two great seasonal events of the year. The break-up of the ice in spring begins in the small streams. When these are open, the increase of water in the main streams arches the ice sheet and finally breaks it up. The broken ice usually jams at some point lower down. The pent-up water behind the jam breaks out again and sweeps the river clear of ice.

In the fall, navigation is interrupted before the actual closing of the streams, by drift ice. This is mainly ice that has formed in the bays and has become detached and descends the rivers. This continues until the increasing cold causes the mass to jam and become solidly cemented. Drift ice is usually encountered in the lower Athabaska during the first half of October, and solid ice about the middle of October. The mouth of the Athabaska breaks up about the first of May, but the neighboring part of the lake seldom opens until the middle of the month, while the easterly portion remains solid until June.

A CANADIAN HOMESTEAD

DEAR MR. NORTH: Will you kindly let me know to whom I should write for information, literature, et cetera, about a Canadian homestead? I would like to go to either Alberta or Saskatchewan. J. SHEPPARD.
Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Natural Resources Intelligence Branch, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Ontario, would be glad to send you descriptive literature of homesteading in the prairie provinces of Canada. If you want to file on a government homestead, you have to become a British subject.

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MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

MARY.—Please write to me. I am sorry and lonesome. Ed. G., 189 Spicer Street, Akron, Ohio.

REID, JACK.—Born in St. Johns, Newfoundland. Fair complexion, blue eyes, five feet seven inches in height and slim. He was in Boston, Massachusetts. Write to your aunt, Mrs. Harriet Power, 69 Jay Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

ROSENTHAL, ARNOLD.—Last seen in St. Louis, Missouri, six years ago. Twenty-seven years old, five feet six inches tall, dark hair and complexion, and brown eyes. His brother would like to hear from him. Herman Rosenthal, 2312 West 51st Place, Chicago, Illinois.

WINDROSS, RAYMOND H.—Please write to your buddy, whom you left in Portland, Maine, as there is important news. His trade is a typewriter repairman. Write to C. H. Underwood, Typewriter Repairman, Q. M. C. Detachment, Army Base, Boston, Massachusetts.

SIEFKE, CLARENCE W.—Left home, Wordville, Ohio, August, 1926. Have important news for him. His brothers and sister want to hear from him. Anne Siefke May, 907 Alvison Road, Toledo, Ohio.

HATFIELD, LOREN EDGAR.—Twenty-eight years of age. Last heard of at 901 Campbell Street, Kansas City, Missouri, in 1925. Write to your brother, L. A. Hatfield, Box 356, Barnsdall, Oklahoma.

BAKER, Mrs. ESTHER M.—I long for you. Won't you please let me know where you are and how you are? George W. Baker, Jr., 50 Innis Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

SIGNOR, RALPH.—If you are a Signor, please write to me, as I would like to hear from any relatives. R. A. Signor, Box 21, Dover, Florida.

INGERSOLL, BENJAMIN WARREN.—About eighty-two years old. Went to Indian Territory about 1892, from Hubbell, Nebraska. Average height and size, scar on top of head. Meat cutter by trade. Please send information to his son. Peter Ingersoll, 220 North 7th Street, Guthrie, Oklahoma.

KNOCH, GLEN.—Goes by the name of Jack McDonald. Missing since April 19, 1926. Dark-brown eyes, brown hair, six feet four inches in height, twenty-eight years old, about one hundred and ninety pounds. Last seen in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Notify mother, Mrs. John Knoch, 915 Zeyn Street, Anaheim, California.

CATRON, BELLE MACBETH.—Write to W. H. Firestock, Box 756, Porterville, California.

O'DONNELL, PHIL.—Has been missing for fifteen years. Worked as a miner in Nevada. Tall and handsome, blue eyes, light-brown hair, and about forty years of age. Sister is anxious to hear from him. A., care of this magazine.

FURVIS, MAY.—In 1911 she lived at 929 Kent Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. The marine who knew her would like to hear from her. Jack Dalton, 4811 Meridian Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

E. M. B.—Write me at once. I paid up the P. I. Company, and dad paid up the loan company, and took over the lots. E. M. B.

FRANK B.—Mother and all the folks are glad to hear from you and wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Write how you are getting along. Willy S. F.

HILLER, ROBERT WINIFRED.—Born at Waterloo, New York, August 15, 1901. Five feet ten inches tall, has brown hair and eyes, and weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Last-known address was West Side Y. M. C. A., 1434 West 32d Street, Cleveland, Ohio. His brother would like to hear from you. Carl, Waterloo, New York.

COOPER, PETE.—Was in the livery-stable business a few years ago in Michigan. Please write to an old friend, Kute O'Hara.

COLLIER, LARRY.—Please write to us. We are worried about you. Bill is looking for you. Mother.

VAN DYKE, NEALEY.—Born in New Jersey. Write your sister, Mrs. Bertha Tyson, 62 Marmont Street, Niles, Michigan.

SCHATKOSKY, EDWARD.—At one time went by the name of Ed Miller. Was last seen in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, three years ago. Left Canada eight years ago with a fellow by the name of Fred Rinas. Carpenter by trade. Is five feet eleven inches tall, weighs one hundred and seventy pounds, has dark hair. I would like to hear from either of them. Evelyn Maddock, 928 East Oregon Street, Portland, Oregon.

HAMMOCK, ROY.—Twenty-four years old, five and a half feet tall, light complexion, blue-gray eyes, dark hair. Last seen in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1924. His father's health is bad and can't live long. Please write to your sister, Mrs. W. A. Patterson, Box 285, Pineland, Texas.

MONTGOMERY, JOHN.—Known as Johnny Alec Rou. Please write to your sister, Katie. Mrs. Katherine Ann Mulholland, 9554 107a Avenue, Edmonton, Alta., Canada.

MOONEYHAN, JACK.—Last heard from at Hot Springs, Arkansas. Write to your old mate, A. C. Tarver, Box 248, Mineral Wells, Texas.

BARBER, C. C.—Would the person who wrote me a letter stating he was C. C. Barber, write again to his mother? I wrote, but letter came back from Falleon, Nevada. Mrs. Joe Beckman, 606 East 14th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

MORGAN, LEE EARL.—Last heard from in Pensacola, Florida, in 1918. He is an electrician. Left Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1917. Mayie died two years ago. Your mother never recovered from the shock, and is failing fast. She is eager to see you. Have you forgotten your three children? Get in touch with us. E. M.

GUNTER, JEAN BEN and RICHARD.—Separated in Mississippi before the Civil War. Carried by father to Missouri and placed thirty-five miles west of St. Louis. These boys were hired out to Billy Inman and his father to work on a farm. Jean Ben had on right forefinger a peculiar nail resembling a rattlesnake. Both have fair skin, blue eyes, and light hair. William J. Gunter, Lewisville, Texas.

NIMMO, LLOYD A.—Was at Klamath Falls, Oregon, June 14, 1925. Please write to me at once. Address letter in my married name. Dutch, 3308½ Maypole Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

WALLACE, SUSIE EDNA.—Baby daughter of Frances James and Sam Houston Wallace. Forty-seven years old, and was last heard of in Idaho in 1906. Her niece, S., would appreciate any information concerning her. Frances E. Bauer, Rolls, Texas.

PURDIN, FIELDING.—Please write to your son. He was last heard of in Texas, working for the Wawn Live Stock Co. Silas E. Purdin, Box 664, Ostrander, Washington.

BEARD, Mrs. MYRTLE.—Her maiden name was Garland. Last seen in Chicago. Thirty-one years old, blue eyes, brown hair, below medium height, and rather plump. Please write to your sister. Alpha Moore, 230½ Randolph Street, Enid, Oklahoma.

MISNER, C. C.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Your father and mother are anxious to hear from you. Come home or write. C. E. Misner, 1719 2d Street, Napa, California.

DAVEY.—I would like to find my mother. When five years of age, I was placed in a home. At one time we lived in Bleecker Street, New York City. Later my people lived at 229 East 10th Street, New York City. John Davey, care of Martin Cross, Selkirk, New York.

LOWRY, FRANCIS A.—Formerly of Flint, Michigan, but last heard of in Saginaw, Michigan. Please get in touch with me at once. Valuable information. C. A. C., care of this magazine.

BRADLY, JOHN ROBERT.—Left February, 1917. Any one knowing his present address kindly write to Mrs. Annie Bradly, 1536 Brighton Road, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

KNIGHT, JESSE and JOHN.—John was in Palestine. His sister would like to hear from them. Mrs. Frances Thornhill, R., Box 49, Alba, Texas.

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BROWN, HENRY SPEARMAN.—Last heard from at Birmingham, Alabama, in 1921. Is about forty-five years old, six feet tall, has gray eyes, medium-brown hair, and a blue scar over one eye. Please write to your children, Mrs. Vera Sanders, 44 Prince Street, Anderson, South Carolina.

HAINES, GEORGE CLIFFORD.—Twenty-eight years old, five feet seven inches tall, one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Has brown hair, gray eyes, and light complexion. Served twenty-seven months in United States navy during the World War. Enlisted from Cody, Wyoming, in April, 1917, training at San Francisco. Served on U. S. S. "San Diego" until it was sunk in New York harbor. Left Casper, Wyoming, May, 1923. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, June 13, 1923. Had worked in oil refinery. Please notify his sister, Mrs. D. R. Park, Momence, Illinois.

HAYES, HOWDO.—Your sisters are anxious to hear from you. Please write E. & N.

ELMER, LINCOLN, BISMARCK, and MARY.—They were last seen in Deadwood, South Dakota, thirty-two years ago. Were placed in homes at Deadwood, but Mary was taken away by some family. At that time the boys were four and five years old, respectively. Any information will be appreciated by their sister, Mrs. Anna L. Alcott, care of George Cooney, The Mint, Helena, Montana.

V. D.—Please write to your married sister or come home. Mother is brooding over you. She cares so much and so do I. Jerry.

C. W. E.—Please write to me as soon as you see this. Mrs. H. F., South Dakota.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of buddies who were in Co. M, 56th Infantry, from June, 1917, until July, 1920. Whistler, care of this magazine.

TRAYLER, Mrs. ALMA.—Last heard from at Cooper, Texas, in 1921. Any one knowing his present address will kindly write to an anxious relative. Ernest Van Winkle, 722 Irving Street, Jackson, Michigan.

WEBBER, EMIL WALTER.—If you see this, write at once. I am discharged now and want to help you. Brother Billie, 12 Harmony Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

BUSH, PIERCE.—Last heard from in Missouri. Please write to Richard S. Bush, 322 Gwinn Avenue, Lead, South Dakota.

PARKER, ROY.—Father is dead, and we want to settle an estate. Worried about you. Mrs. Dora C. Bush, 322 Gwinn Avenue, Lead, South Dakota.

WORDEY, BELL.—Last seen in Breckenridge, Texas. Last heard from in 1924 in McKinney, Texas. Would like to hear from you. S. A. C., care of this magazine.

HADLEY, CHARLEY.—He is now past twenty years of age. His name was Charley Fulmer until he was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. A. Hadley of Iowa, when he was eighteen months old. Mr. and Mrs. Hadley separated when Charley was eight years old. At fifteen he ran away and was supposed to have joined the navy. Write, as there is news of importance. C. H., care of this magazine.

HILL, HARRY and NELLIE.—Father's name was Charley, and mother's was Hattie. They were once in Missouri. C. H., care of this magazine.

FREER, HARRY L.—Last heard of twelve years ago at Poplar Bluff, Missouri. About thirty-eight years old, light, curly hair, blue eyes, scar on upper lip. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Millie Mount, 320 Scott Avenue, Fort Scott, Kansas.

DUKE.—Please write to me at Akron, Indiana. Big Duke.

NOLEN, STANLEY.—T. I. S. pal would like to hear from you. R. L. W., 712 Grand Central Avenue, Tampa, Florida.

CROSS, Miss ALICE.—Your pal at Fort Wayne, Detroit, Michigan, in April, 1924, would like to hear from you. Grover C. Prescott, Gamboa, Canal Zone, Panama.

LA MONT, Mrs. JANIE BIRD.—Maiden name was Feilder. Was born and raised near Pelican Rapids, Otter Tail Co., Minnesota. Please send present address to C. S. King, R. 3, Everett, Washington.

GALLIGAN, ROY.—Haven't heard from you for ten years. Please write to Jennie, 790 Mt. Vernon Avenue, San Bernardino, California.

E. I.—Where are you and why don't you write? I love you and am nearly crazy with worry. The least you could do would be to notify Minnie or Edna. Three months is a long time. Write, if only to say you are well. Fred.

LORA, JOSEPH R.—Last heard of in Fresno, California. Your old pard would like to hear from you. S. R. Schoonover, 310 South Hinds Street, Greenville, Mississippi.

LUCY.—Write to your brother, Hugh Donnahue, Hotel Bronx, San Diego, California.

WOODMAS, CHARLES B.—Last heard from at Spokane, Washington, in 1913. About fifty years old, light hair, five feet two inches tall, and weighs two hundred pounds. Write Leonard Woodmas, 1435 Bath Street, Santa Barbara, California.

EDWARDS, Mrs. HENRY.—Her maiden name was Effie Price. Formerly of Fort Worth, Texas, but last heard from in Wisconsin. Please write to your old friend. If any of her brothers see this please notify Mrs. Clyde G. Miller, R. F. D. 1, Morris, Illinois.

MASON, ROY W.—Disappeared November 7, 1926. Was district agent for Curtis Publishing Co., and was last seen in Birmingham, Alabama. Possibly victim of amnesia. Twenty-two years of age, five feet eight inches tall, weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. Dark-gray eyes and dark hair. Write to Fred H. McDugg, or W. W. Mason, 207 North Pearl Street, Birmingham, Alabama.

F. W.—Your request for my address appeared in this column, and I sent it in. Why have you not written? J. A., 4117 Jacob Street, Wheeling, West Virginia.

JERABEK, ED.—Haven't seen you for twenty-six years since we left Nebraska. Am very ill. Write Anna Jerabek, 790 Mt. Vernon Avenue, San Bernardino, California.

DAVIS, GOLDIE.—Write to your old friend. Patsy, care of this magazine.

NIELSON, Mrs. BURGER.—Maiden name was Gladys Ramsy. Write to Mae, care of this magazine.

ROMINE, JOHN.—Come home. Your family is sick and needs you. Wife and children.

McELLROY, BILL.—Please come back, regardless of what came between us. Everything is O. K. with me now. I'm working again. Your father is dying and calls for you. Love from the girl you left behind. S.

SHAFFER, RUBEN.—*Known as "Schocky." Was aboard* the U. S. S. "Cantigny," in 1920. Write to L. F. Kennedy, 1909 Avenue N½, Galveston, Texas.

HAGART, GEORGE, and CAVANAUGH, BILL.—Last heard of in Minnesota, but formerly came from Nova Scotia. Write Ivan House, 1350 North Miami Avenue, Miami, Florida.

DARNELL.—Would like to get in touch with my father and sister. Last heard of in Union City, Tennessee. John Cattan, care of this magazine.

HOWARD.—Please write to your baby sister. Have always longed to hear from you. Love from L. S. S., care of this magazine.

VOUGAL, FRED C.—Last heard of in New York in 1917. Was leaving for France. His father and sisters lived then in Flomaton, Alabama. Five feet tall, blue eyes, fair complexion, light, curly hair, and weighed one hundred and thirty-five pounds. His arm was tattooed with "F. C. V. and death before dishonor." Write, as there is important news for you. Mattie, care of this magazine.

BARTON, CLARK.—Please write Gladys B. at Sanger, Route B, Box 322.

HOOPER, Mrs. MARGARET.—Matron at the Service Club at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. Her maiden name was Margaret Lovell. Musician, care of this magazine.

DUBOIS, EMILE M.—Formerly at 42 Rue de D'Marle, Boulogne, Sur Mer, France. He was employed by M. Camille Dufias at the Cheveaux Boucherie. Write to Musician, care of this magazine.

PURCELL, MARY.—Last heard of in Wichita, Kansas, thirty-five years ago. Her son was adopted from her when six weeks old. Write, as there is important news. Mrs. C. H. D., care of this magazine.

McDANIELS, EARL J.—Went overseas and came back in 1919 to go to Fox Hills, New York. Last heard from at Amarillo, Texas, in 1921. His home used to be in Vernon and Odell, Texas. Write to Williams, care of this magazine.

PARKS, WILFRED A.—Was soldier in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1922. *Married in New York in 1920.* Write to Williams, care of this magazine.

PETERSON, Mrs. CHRYSTAL LOUDER.—Once lived in Missouri, then in California, and later in Portland, Oregon. Last heard of in Seattle, Washington. Your old friend, Hazel B., would like to hear from you. Write to Mrs. D. L. Sirer, R. 1, Box 63, Lizard, Oregon.

KAY.—Mommie Failine cries for you. Word from you will save her life. Grandfather passed away. Dad.

FOXY THE WAIF.—All is forgiven. Come home. Are you still in Florida? Dad.

ATTENTION.—Men of the 76th M. G. T. C. stationed at Camp Hancock, Georgia, in 1918. Please write an old pal, who needs your help. Joe W. Watson, 410 Poalk Street, Amarillo, Texas.

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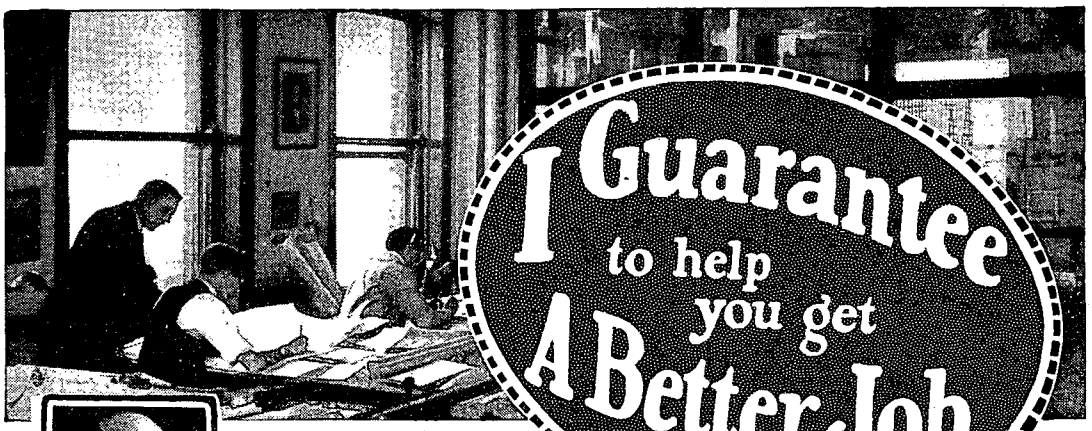

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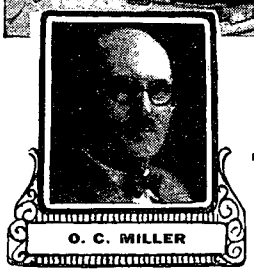

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